

HOW
NOT TO
SUMMON
— A —
DEMON
LORD

VOLUME

14

Yukiya Murasaki
Illust. Takahiro Tsurusaki



HOW
NOT TO
SUMMON
— A —
DEMON
LORD

VOLUME
14

Yukiya Murasaki
Illust. Takahiro Tsurusaki

*Klem levitated
above him and
brought her lips
closer to his.*

*“I leave it all...
in your hands,
Diablo...”*





"You won't
ever lay
hands on me!
Diablo won't
let you!"

"Take this,
《Arrow Storm》!"

**“Heh... Heheh...
I have to spend my
second life... bowing
down to shitty old
men like you, all
over again...?!
Never!”**

**“《Shining
Lance》!”**

**She'd never again
live her life having to
lick the boots of a
superior she hated.
She triggered a
non-verbal spell.**





CHARACTERS



A top player of a game very similar to this world. He is in fact socially inept, and can't communicate without acting the part of his in-game character.
AKA: "The Demon Lord from Another World"



A Pantherian summoner. The Demon Lord Krebskulm was sealed in her body, but she finally removed her after much hardship. Serious to a fault.



Princess of the Elves. Choosing Diablo as the king of her country, she finally became queen. Claims to be a summoner, but is a much more skilled archer. Speaks in a light, easygoing fashion.



The High Priest who stands as the highest authority of the church. Diablo saved her from the Cardinal Authority's devious plots, and has worshipped him as an avatar of God ever since.



A duke's daughter and an Imperial Knight who despises the races, despite her standing. Was captured by the Empire and placed within the Magimatic Sol Goldinus.



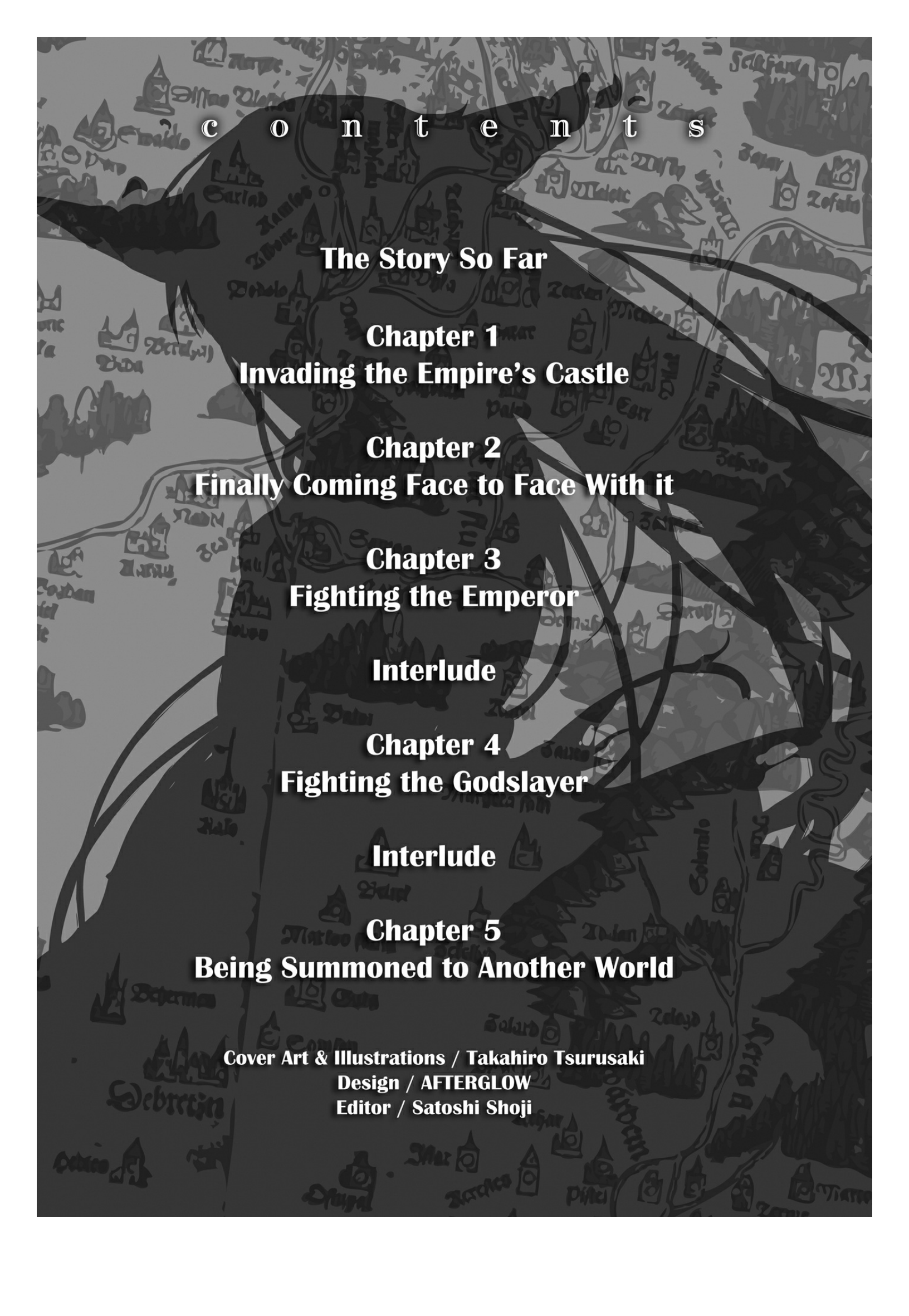
The Kingdom of Lyferia's minister, who has betrayed their homeland. Currently on the run with the Order of Palace Knights.

A powerful demon who once conspired to revive the Demon Lord Krebskulm. Now spends her days working to pay for Klem's biscuits.



The strongest Demon Lord, Krebskulm. She is now an innocent girl who loves biscuits.





c o n t e n t s

The Story So Far

Chapter 1 Invading the Empire's Castle

Chapter 2 Finally Coming Face to Face With it

Chapter 3 Fighting the Emperor

Interlude

Chapter 4 Fighting the Godslayer

Interlude

Chapter 5 Being Summoned to Another World

Cover Art & Illustrations / Takahiro Tsurusaki

Design / AFTERGLOW

Editor / Satoshi Shoji

The Story So Far—

In the MMORPG *Cross Reverie*, Takuma Sakamoto was overwhelmingly powerful, and was able to role play so well that his performances were more boss-like than the actual bosses of the game. For this reason, he came to be known as the “Demon Lord.”

By defeating the Demon Lord of the Mind, Enkvaros, faster than anyone else, he obtained the super rare item, the 《Demon Lord’s Ring》. It was one of the ultimate pieces of equipment in the game, able to reflect all types of magic.

Then, one day, Takuma found himself summoned to a world that looked exactly like *Cross Reverie*! Having performed the ritual magic at the same time, the Pantherian, Rem, and the Elf, Shera, fought over which one of them was his summoner.

But thanks to the Demon Lord’s Ring he wore, the magic was reflected, so the Enslavement Collar meant for him clamped onto the two girls instead!

Faced with Rem and Shera arguing, Takuma was at a loss of what to do. While he may have been a superior player back in the game, he couldn’t talk with other people if his life depended on it. After struggling with what to say, the words that came out of his mouth matched the Demon Lord role play he had used in the game:

“Cease your pointless squabbling. You are in the presence of Diablo.”

Diablo soon after found himself foiling an invasion of one hundred Fallen led by a Fallen named Edelgard, as well as an attack from within the city of Faltra at the hands of the Fallen Gregore. Diablo then later found himself the recipient of a quest from the governor of Faltra, Galford. Prince Keera of the Elven Kingdom of Greenwood demanded Shera be returned to him, threatening open war with Faltra should they fail to comply. The details of Galford’s quest were simply to find a way to avoid the war. The bespectacled, straight-and-narrow Imperial Knight Alicia was assigned to the group as an observer to watch over their actions.

Using the 《Marionette's Flute》, Keera manipulated Shera and unleashed a forbidden summon called the Force Hydra — yet Diablo still managed to rescue her.

After her rescue, the group set off to resurrect the Demon Lord Krebskulm trapped inside Rem. But in the process, Krebskulm had lost a portion of her memories as a Demon Lord, being reduced to a biscuit-loving young girl who was then nicknamed “Klem.”

Peaceful days passed by...

Suddenly, Alicia betrayed the group! Now awakened as a true Demon Lord, Klem went into a destructive frenzy. But thanks to one of Diablo's ultimate spells and the sound of Rem's and Shera's voices, Klem was subdued and reverted to her biscuit-loving form. To ensure Klem would never go berserk again, Diablo bound her with the same enslavement magic afflicted upon Shera and Rem.

Through a string of coincidences, or perhaps God's own guidance, Diablo found himself rescuing Lumachina, a holy woman, from the Paladin Gewalt. Being a High Priest, Lumachina was the highest ranking member of the church. However, due to her attempts at ridding the church of corruption and avarice, she was nearly assassinated. Still seeking to reform the corrupt church, Lumachina sought the help of the Paladin Captain Batutta, setting out to meet him in Zircon Tower.

As Zircon Tower was located in the perilous expanse of the former Demon Lord's Domain, Diablo's group of Adventurers accompanied Lumachina as bodyguards. After a long journey, they arrived at their destination, and were greeted by Batutta.

While there, Diablo claimed back his own dungeon, gained many pieces of helpful equipment and items, and fought off the new Demon Lord's army, gaining new allies in the process: the Grasswalker Horn, and the Magimatic Maid Rose.

Shortly after, Horn decided to change classes and study to become a sorcerer, leaving for the magic academy.

But they could not celebrate their victories, however. Having been informed

that the Elven king, Shera's father, had passed away, the four traveled to her homeland where Shera was already engaged to a pig-faced elf called Drango (for the sake of the country, of course). Diablo thwarted the wedding, giving her a wedding ring and assuming the throne as the new king of Greenwood.

Diablo then fought and defeated his next great opponent, the Demon Overlord Modinaram. Saving Rem, who had been taken captive, he gave her a wedding ring also. But news of Diablo's heroic deeds reached the king of Lyferia, Delouche Xandros. Diablo attempted to ignore the order calling him for an audience with the king, but still begrudgingly found himself in the audience chamber.

What awaited him in the castle weren't words of praise, but gazes full of suspicion. Left with no choice, Diablo accepted a quest from the king as an adventurer in order to guarantee the safety of him and his companions.

His quest led him to the southern frontier town of Caliture, Rem's hometown, where her family and clan of martial artists — the Gadou Clan — resided. There, Rem's aunt, Solami, trained him in the use of the Glow.

The objective of his quest was to slay a clan of Kobolds, but Diablo ended up befriending the creatures and turning against the Kingdom of Lyferia. But before things could develop any further, the Gelmed Empire invaded Lyferia from the east!

Gelmed's elite soldiers and commander, Aira, use Magimatic Sols, the same weapon Rose does. Lyferia's army took to the battlefield to oppose them, led by the king himself. However, Lyferia's efforts ended in spectacular defeat, and the King of Lyferia perished in combat. The Lyferian army was routed, and the capital, Seven Wall, became occupied by the enemy.

Diablo and his group infiltrated the castle and successfully slayed the enemy commander...only for Emperor Gelmed's mobile castle, the Magimatic Castle Viovix, to appear!

"The Girl of the Vessel! Accept me! Conceive me, give birth to me, grant me new life! If you do, I shall make you into the holy mother!"

The former prime minister, Noah Gibun, was then revealed to be an outsider — a player of *Cross Reverie* who came from another world, like Diablo. Seeking

the power needed to defeat Emperor Gelmed's overwhelming strength, she recruited the young Demon Lord Klem to her side and asked Diablo to cooperate as well.

Traumatized by his social experiences, Diablo initially refused, but eventually...

"I admit it. You are the leader."

"Thank you, Diablo. I will do everything to answer the trust you've placed in me."

Diablo resolves to fight as part of a party.

Prologue

Although the sun should have been hanging overhead, its rays failed to extend to the ground. The rain that had been falling since early morning was gradually intensifying, and the wind was blowing hard. It was probably going to be a downpour.

—As fitting as weather for a decisive battle could be.

Diablo gazed up at the leaden sky. He'd gone out to the Inner Sanctum's drenched balcony without even bothering to put on his robe.

One woman was there as the leader of their group, and Diablo stood still, listening as one of her subordinates. It was the first time he'd followed someone else's lead since coming to this world.

That woman's name was Noah Gibun. He didn't know what her name was in the old world. She did tell him, her voice thick with resentment, that she was an office lady from some kind of exploitative business.

"We will now begin our attack on Emperor Gelmed's castle," she said, her voice dignified.

"It's finally time to go ham!" Alan the Dwarf raised his voice enthusiastically.

The other members of the Palace Knights shrugged. Diablo felt like it had nothing to do with him, but he was still technically part of this group now. He heaved a small sigh.

—A party... Playing as a member of a party, huh...?

Never in his life did he ever perform well when it came to cooperation, team games, or really any group activities. It hung over him like a thick, smoldering cloud of depression. But he wouldn't be able to overcome the enemy on his own.

The Magimatic Castle Viovox was capable of shutting down all manners of magic. If his teleportation or flight magic were to be canceled, he'd die a

terrible accidental death before the fight even began. But Noah seemed to have some kind of transportation method in mind that could circumvent the castle's defenses. Diablo didn't know what her plan was; he was interested in finding out, and could ask her... But asking a question in the middle of a group discussion was too difficult for Diablo.

In fact, with his crippling social anxiety, even holding a conversation was a challenge in and of itself. He'd somehow managed to barely speak to people in this world by playing the part of his Demon Lord player character, but that wouldn't fly here. He was a party member now. Even Diablo knew that throwing around arrogant "Demon Lord" lines at a time like this would be extremely tactless, so he had remained completely silent ever since this meeting began.

But while he held his tongue, all the words he wanted to say were bouncing around in his head.

—Aah. This reminds me of living back in my old world. Games were all I lived for, I'd only open my mouth when I had to eat, and I'd get to be a powerful Demon Lord in the MMO.

His past flashed before his eyes. But as Diablo was lost in his reveries, Klem spoke up next to him.

"How do we get to that castle?" she asked, pointing at the gigantic Magimatic Castle floating in the sky above them.

She may have looked like an adorable girl, but she was in fact a real Demon Lord. And not just any Demon Lord — she was Krebskulm, said to be the strongest of all Demon Lords. Krebskulm was normally a gigantic, armored monster, but she had sealed that form for the time being, instead appearing as a young girl.

"You're not going to suggest we climb all the way up there, are you?" she continued.

The Emperor's castle was looming ever closer, like a poisonous insect poised to devour the fruit that was the capital. It was half a day away at best. It walked on tower-like legs, the castle itself standing higher than any mountain. The idea of climbing to that height was daunting.

“We’ll use 《Teleportation》,” Noah answered.

“Mm...? But won’t its barrier deflect magic?”

“That won’t be a problem,” Noah said, taking something out of her pockets. “We’ll use this magic item. We’ve already tested it and confirmed that it can break through the castle’s protection.”

It was a folded fabric. It didn’t look all that expensive; it appeared no different from any hemp cloth sold on the market. But when Diablo focused and tried to see if he could detect any magic energy flowing through it...the light-brown fabric seemed to be glowing with light.

“Hmph,” Klem scoffed at it. “It reeks of magic this Demon Lord doesn’t know. Did you make it?”

“No, I received it from the Archsage Marine. She’s lived for many years and created many unusual magical tools.”

“I see,” Klem said and fell silent, her expression still slightly dubious.

Apparently something still felt somehow off to her. Diablo knew very little about this world’s Archsage, since Marine was an NPC that hardly appeared in the game.

However! A Demon Lord couldn’t let on that he didn’t know about something. That would look lame. And so, Diablo crossed his arms with the most pensive expression he could muster and nodded briefly.

“Hmph, a magical tool made by the Archsage,” he said vaguely.

Noah and the sorceress Utata snuck suspicious glances at him, but neither of them actually asked him if he knew about it. Thankfully.

“This time, I asked a certain woman for help,” Noah continued. “She should guide us within the castle.”

As if that were her cue, a Kobold girl appeared, clad in the Gelmed military’s uniform.

“I’m Aira Arjana, former commander of the Gelmed Empire’s Magimatic Sol unit. I was forced into servitude by the Empire, but thanks to him, I’ve been set free.”

Everyone else followed Aira's gaze, which settled on Diablo. All the attention almost made him squeal, but he desperately suppressed his panic and kept up his Demon Lord role play.

"Hmph! You think a Demon Lord like me would save you? Don't delude yourself! I merely sentenced a fool who opposed me to death!"

This was his attempt at masking his embarrassment. But his appearance and the acting he'd perfected to the point of muscle memory actually made it convincing.

"M-My apologies..." Aira winced.

The Palace Knights all looked at him, their eyes clearly nervous. The only ones who remained calm were Klem; her attendant, Edelgard; and Noah, who knew Diablo's true identity.

"Regardless of what happened before, she's on our side now," Noah said in an indifferent tone. "We should set aside our differences, so as to not create unnecessary discord."

Diablo held his lips, so as to urge her to continue. Noah continued her briefing.

"This magical tool can form a door that will lead us to any place our eyes can see. This means it won't help us indoors, and as you can see, the castle is quite large, so we'll absolutely need Miss Aira here to guide us. She was once in charge of the castle's garrison, after all."

"Yes," Aira affirmed. "It's been a couple of years since then, but there hasn't been any major remodeling that I know of."

"I'd imagine. It's said the Empire's castle has never been breached by enemy soldiers before. They wouldn't remodel the place if they didn't have to."

"The Empire only acts based on rationalism, after all," Aira nodded.

"We'll be relying on you," Noah told her encouragingly.

It really felt like an office lady being recruited into a company in the middle of her career. The members of the Palace Knights welcomed Aira easily enough, and Diablo was the only one still scowling. Utata, the Grasswalker girl, keenly

noticed that and questioned him.

“Oh, you there. Displeased, are you? Having a former enemy commander guide us through their castle is all sorts of comfy, isn’t it?”

“...It is convenient, yes.”

Having a door that takes you everywhere and a guide to go with it...

“What’s making you so prickly, then?” Utata asked.

Although he knew she wouldn’t understand, Diablo replied.

“...We’ve got a new dungeon to explore, but it’s like reading the strategy guide about it before we even go in. It’s boring.”

“I’ve got, like, no clue what you’re talking about~” Utata said flippantly.

“Hmph. Mere mortals couldn’t hope to understand the thoughts of a Demon Lord,” Diablo retorted proudly.

Of course she wouldn’t get it. This was a matter of personal preference. Diablo did look through message boards and walkthrough sites and use the knowledge and impressions of other players. But he believed that a dungeon’s first run ought to be a blind one, if only for the sake of fun.

—There’s nothing like tackling the new event early and being the first to beat it without any cheating or walkthroughs! That’s the gaming addict’s way!

Of course, Diablo did understand the situation and realized he couldn’t approach this like a game. The lives of many hinged on their success. He couldn’t prioritize having fun here. It would be the kind of irrational argument that would get him chewed out in public.

—Still, emotion and personal taste aren’t influenced by rationality or weighing risks and benefits!

Diablo knew that moving purely on emotion was a problem in and of itself. But fun, both in games and outside of them, came from a balance of challenge and reward. The less challenging a game was, the more it became a chore, its enjoyability decreased, and Diablo’s interest faded. And honestly, Diablo hoped he wouldn’t need to experience that kind of bland disappointment in this world too.

Noah spread out the cloth.

“Magical energy, sufficient! Magical Tool: Cloth Gate... Open!”

Diablo’s heart danced for a moment. The sheer theatrical nature of the cloth’s activation was so fantastic in appearance that Diablo couldn’t help but get excited. The Palace Knights didn’t show any surprise, though. This clearly wasn’t their first time seeing this, so Diablo tried not to let his excitement show on his face.

“Enter!” Noah called out.

The Palace Knights raised their voices in a battle cry at her order.

“Let’s goooooo!” Alan the Hero led the pack.

He was a silver-haired Dwarf with an aggressive attitude who excelled in single combat. Perfect for a vanguard. Thanatos the Elf fencer followed after him. The group’s leader, Maximum Abrams, remained at Noah’s side, prepared to defend her in any situation. The other members hurried inside.

—I think it’s my first time having to wait my turn to invade a place.

“Rem and Shera might have come to see us off,” Klem told him.

Diablo was silent. If he looked back, perhaps he’d see them there. The others could have come too. Rose, Lumachina, Horn, Sylvie... Maybe he could spare one last look.

But Diablo shook his head, as if to banish that thought. He couldn’t find the words to respond to Klem.

—I can’t get used to this.

At least whenever he acted out the role of a proud Demon Lord, he’d never been at a loss for words like this. But now he was Noah’s subordinate, so it felt like acting all high and mighty was absurd. And he was so socially inept that the moment he even started wondering about tact, he was done for. If he were to act like his true self, all he’d do was stammer and stutter. And he couldn’t let his friends see him like this.

So Diablo didn't turn around.

"Seeing off, needless? Needless!" Edelgard the Fallen said with her particular manner of speech, standing next to Klem. "Emperor, defeat! For sure! Sooo, back soon!"

"That's right!" Klem nodded with a grin. "We'll be back soon and have lots of biscuits!"

—Even if we drive away the Imperial army, I doubt there are any bakeries that could still bake biscuits in the capital's ruins...

"And that apple tart too!" Klem pumped her fist into the air.

Such a fancy sweet didn't exist in Lyferia. But Noah, being an outsider, introduced it to this world. The very same Noah who was now urging them to go ahead.

"Don't dawdle!" she called out to them.

—It's the first time I've walked into a battlefield with that kind of thing said to me.

Diablo sprinted after the Palace Knights and crossed the Cloth Gate. Klem and Edelgard followed suit behind him. He could hear the sound of the wind around him change, and when he opened his eyes on the other side, a different sight spread out before him. He could hear the sound of weapons clashing.

The time for leisurely conversation had come to an end.

†

Sitting in her office in the Inner Sanctum, Lumachina received a report.

"Prime Minister Noah has led the Palace Knights into the Magimatic Castle Viovix!" the Paladin Tria said with a salute.

Lumachina nodded and turned her gaze to the people gathered in the room, eventually settling it on Rem and Shera.

"Are you sure you shouldn't have gone to see them?" she asked.

"If Diablo had wanted us to, we would have," Rem said with a serious voice. "But we can't get in the way of his concentration. I trust him to come back

safely.”

“I wanted to hug him before he left, but Rem said not to!” Shera whined.

“We shouldn’t do anything unnecessary before a major battle,” Rem said tersely.

“Won’t he get lonely?”

“He won’t.”

They’d been bickering like this the whole time. And since Rem and Shera wouldn’t see him, the rest abstained from doing so too. Rose’s expressionless face somehow made her annoyance clear.

“I surely would have accompanied him had my Magimatic Sol not been damaged,” she said bitterly.

“I mean, if I were thirty years younger,” Sylvie shrugged.

“Me?!” Horn squealed, seemingly talking to some figure in her head. “I’d just hold them back if I went! Use the Holy Grail...? What, no, no, no way!”

She was acting cheerful, but maybe she was under some kind of severe stress... Lumachina couldn’t help but feel concerned about her.

Of course, Horn was actually talking to Babalon, goddess of the Holy Grail. But since Babalon was a goddess from another world, no one but the owner of the Grail — Horn in this case — could see her.

“We can’t assume they’ll come back safe and sound from a battle like this,” Lumachina said, rising from her chair. “We should begin preparations for aid and healing.”

“Understood, Your Grace,” Tria said with a deep bow.

The other believers all began to move in accordance with her words.

“Shera, we should be prepared to fight too, in case something happens,” Rem nodded.

“Fight what?” Shera asked her.

“I don’t know. But protecting the people is an Adventurer’s job,” Rem said resolutely.

Rem's firm words seemed to have filled Shera's heart with excitement. She clenched her fists.

"Yeah! Let's help!"

Chapter 1: Infiltrating the Imperial Castle

Diablo crossed the Cloth Gate. Fighting had already broken out where he emerged. There was rain pelting down, making the ground quite slippery. But then again, everyone present was a high enough level to not be hindered by it.

A large number of small, Human-sized, Magimatic Sol-like units were lined up there. The former corps commander Aira told them these things were called Magi Guards.

“Aaaah, aaah, aaaaaah!” Alan howled as he swung his sword about.

The Magi Guards were by no means weak opponents, but despite this, he swept through them like they were made of twigs, each swing decreasing the number of surrounding Magi Guards. Even in the poor visibility of the heavy rain, he didn’t need to wipe his eyes. It definitely looked like he was swinging randomly, but each blow hit its mark.

He was, without a doubt, a high-level warrior. He wasn’t all talk; he certainly had the strength to match his boasts.

The Elf warrior clad in black, Thanatos, swung his black longsword as if refusing to lose to his comrade. He seemed to be having a bit of a harder time, though.

“Haaa! Demon Buster Breaker! Sacred Drag Slave! Aaaaaaah!”

The Demon magi gunner girl standing behind them raised her voice.

“Stop shouting your stupidly long attack names! Just cut them down! They’re mooks, dammit!”

“Silence! Women have no say in matters of manliness!”

“Mocking women again, are you?! I’m telling Lady Noah!”

“Ngh?! Daisy!”

Right, her name was Daisy. Diablo hadn’t memorized their names yet.

Thanatos thrust his black sword toward Daisy...and stabbed a Magi Guard that had snuck up behind her. After letting out an adorable yelp, she awkwardly spoke, "...Th-Thanks."

"Tch... I cannot believe myself," Thanatos clicked his tongue bitterly. "I defeated it before I could declare my attack's name."

"If you can do it once, do it all the time!" Daisy exclaimed.

"I shan't do it again, not unless I must protect my comrades."

Thanatos then turned around sharply and charged at another enemy, shouting out yet another flamboyant attack name.

"Geez," Daisy pouted and aimed her gun at another Magi Guard.

Watching them bicker, Diablo felt an odd, burning sensation smolder in his stomach.

"...Kuh."

—Look at them, flirting in the middle of an important battle.

Diablo hated nothing more than having to talk to other people, especially young women. This wasn't really the reason he felt this way... Honestly, it was *definitely* not the reason, but...seeing couples flirt on the battlefield filled him with the urge to murder.

But this wasn't jealousy! For sure! Honest!

—Bringing romance into battle is just unforgivable! The battlefield is a sacred place! For sure!

Probably...

"Tch. We need to defeat the Emperor, but...will I need to defeat those normies first?" Diablo muttered to himself.

"What in the world are you talking about?" Noah asked, cutting into his dark monologue.

She was listening to him, apparently.

"Hmph. It looks like you can manage just fine without me," Diablo said.

“I honestly hope that’s the case,” Noah said with a frown.

“Magi Guards are just lookouts,” Aira said, shaking her head as she stood beside Noah. “It’d be for the best if we could infiltrate the castle before the main force shows up, but— Ah!”

Suddenly, Aira gasped. Sensing an approaching enemy, Diablo glared in that direction. A golden Magimatic Sol approached them... 《Goldinus of the Gold》.

As an eerie cackling rang out from within the massive Magimatic Sol, it approached them as if gliding over the ground. Diablo thrust out his staff to intercept the enemy who ground to a halt in front of him. Its metallic legs dug into the castle’s outer walls with a cacophonous metallic screeching. A voice issued from what looked like a megaphone on its headpiece.

“I didn’t think you’d really come! Trying to charge into the Magimatic Castle Viovix... How foolish can you be?!”

“That voice... It really is you, Alicia,” Diablo said.

The Magimatic Sol seemed to stir at the sound of his words.

“You are...”

After a long moment of hesitation, Goldinus of the Gold’s hatch opened with a creaking sound. Inside it was Alicia, enveloped in what looked like tentacles, her body clad in a rubbery suit. She leaned her torso outward.

“...You really did come here, Lord Diablo,” she said.

“Hmph... It seems you haven’t forgotten who I am,” Diablo replied.

“Of course I haven’t. I have sworn my life to serve you, after all.”

Diablo was honestly relieved. If Alicia would have attacked in a mad, bloodthirsty rage, Diablo wasn’t sure what he’d do. Assuming she’d turned on them, defeating her without mercy would have been the correct thing to do. But she’d helped him and his friends more than once, and he did feel pressed to save her if she was dominated by enslavement magic or something of the sort.

When Shera was brainwashed by her brother Keera, Diablo saved her. And while she did do so out of self-interest at the time, Alicia did help him do it.

“Please pass right through, Lord Diablo,” Alicia said, beaming at him.

“Mm?” Diablo’s brows furrowed suspiciously.

“As an extra, I shall also let Lady Klem pass too,” Alicia added.

“An extra! How nice!” Klem raised her hands in a cheer.

It wasn’t an extra like when someone gave her an extra candy, though, so her joy was misdirected. Edelgard’s expression was anxious.

“...Meaning you won’t let the rest of us pass, right?” Noah said with a smirk.



“Heheh, of course not,” Alicia said, still smiling. “Right now, half of me belongs to His Majesty the Emperor, and he ordered me to kill all intruders. But most importantly...”

A crimson glint appeared in Alicia’s eyes.

“...Noah Gibun. I can’t tolerate the fact that ugly beings like you exist.”

Alicia always did harbor a deep hatred for the people at the upper echelons of the Kingdom of Lyferia. So much so that she even wished to see the Demon Lord revived and the Fallen slaughter the mortal races.

“Ugly?” Noah scoffed at her. “How about you take a look at yourself before you call other people names? You’re disgusting. You were nothing more than a noble girl in knight’s clothing. Just because you got inside a Magimatic Sol doesn’t mean you may turn your blade against me!”

Her long time in a palace had likely made Noah develop a discriminatory outlook. Honestly, the two of them were polar opposites of each other.

“...I will kill you here and now, Noah Gibun,” Alicia said, her voice several degrees more chilling than it was a moment ago.

And with an indomitable smile on her lips, she slithered back into Goldinus of the Gold. The hatch snapped shut, tearing a few of the tendrils that had wandered out. They fell to the ground and thrashed like severed lizard tails. The Magimatic Sol looked robotic from the outside, but inside it was some kind of tentacle monster. And those tentacles were apparently some kind of terminal for Emperor Gelmed.

The backstory was that Emperor Gelmed was supposed to be human, but...

—I think he’s long since discarded any humanity he had.

“You traitorous wench...!” Noah spat out bitterly.

“Wait, Lady Noah!” The Order’s captain, Maximum, stopped her. “I don’t think we need to cooperate with her trying to stall us here!”

He stood in front of her, as if trying to cut off her glaring stare with his massive frame.

“Get out of my way, Max!” she snapped at him. “That little slut called me ugly! She called me...!”

“She’s provoking you!” Maximum called out at her.

“Yeah, but still!” Noah insisted.

“Lady Noah!” Maximum raised his voice with uncharacteristic roughness.

This made Noah flinch. She then took a long, deep breath and finally seemed to have regained her composure. She was apparently a lot more impulsive than she looked.

—Or maybe something happened to make her hate the word ‘ugly’...?

To Diablo, a woman’s heart was a deep ocean of secrets; its fathoms were well beyond his understanding. He didn’t have the first idea as to how women’s minds worked, but he could relate to being traumatized by certain words.

Having regained her usual cool expression, Noah began calmly issuing orders.

“Thanatos, Chobi, keep her occupied. I’ll go on ahead.”

Chobi was a tall Pantherian member of the Palace Knights, a warrior who wielded a spear three times her height.

“Wait!” Aira said, her expression severe. “Goldinus of the Gold is different from the other Magimatic Sols. We’re all going to have to fight it off together!”

“We need to defeat the Emperor by nightfall.” Noah shook her head. “If that’s a powerful enemy, then that’s all the more reason for us to avoid fighting it as much as possible.”

“You’re going to treat your men like sacrificial pawns?!” Aira asked her, shocked.

But Thanatos stopped her from going on. He swung his black longsword through the air and laughed scornfully.

“Heh... You said we’re to keep her occupied. But surely you don’t mind if I defeat h—”

“She’s charging us!” Chobi cut into Thanatos’ narcissistic spiel with a shout and thrust her long spear forward. The martial art she unleashed made the tip

of the spear light up, but unlike Thanatos, she didn't shout out some long name. And of course she didn't; it wasn't like this was a spell she had to chant.

†

Goldinus of the Gold responded to Noah's challenge.

"Very well, Palace Knight! I'll start by slaughtering you! You will regret ever serving such a foolish mistress!"

Palpable bloodlust rolled from the Magimatic Sol in waves. It seemed like Alicia had retained her ego and memories; since she was an Imperial Knight, her purpose had been taken away when Noah formed the Palace Knights, which made this a personal grudge.

Of course, considering Alicia was a Demon Lord worshipper, one could say this was overall unjustified... But people don't always have logical reasons for doing battle.

There was no telling how much influence the Emperor's tendrils had over her personality. If Alicia was under the influence of enslavement magic, they wouldn't fight her even if she did show this much hatred toward them. After all, she put her life on the line to defend Lumachina and Rem in the twelfth district.

"Aaaaah!" Chobi moved forward, thrusting her spear.

"Ah!"

Chobi was tall by the standards of the mortal races, but Goldinus was still at least three times her height and wielded a gigantic sword appropriate to its size. It swung through Chobi's body, severing it in half...

—Wait, no... Her form faded away?!

The next moment, a clamorous metallic clanking sound rang out from Goldinus' back.

"Gah?!"

"Too slow!"

Chobi had used a movement-type martial art.

《Blink Thrust》?!

No, it was a different technique. It used the afterimage as a decoy to fool the enemy.

“Get away, you troublesome insect!” Goldinus swept its sword through the air in an attempt to swat her away.

“That armor might increase your power and speed, but your reaction time is still just as sluggish!” Chobi called out.

“You’re calling me slow...?!”

But as Goldinus was confused by Chobi’s swift movements, a crescent-shaped shock wave crashed into it. It was one of Thanatos’ martial arts.

“True Demon’s Slash!”

“Kuh... You...! Are you really normal warriors?!”

“Tch... Such firm defenses! You’re the second opponent to ever withstand my secret arts!” Thanatos grimaced.

“Don’t you say that every time...?” Chobi asked as she rebalanced her spear.

“N-N-No, not at all!” Thanatos sputtered.

But as Diablo watched them fight Goldinus, something felt off to him.

They’re overwhelming it...

This was supposed to be the strongest Magimatic Sol, but it was losing so spectacularly it was almost anticlimactic... Was it really because Alicia was its pilot? She was always talented, but her skill as a knight was average at best. She was level 40 or so, while the Palace Knights were all over level 100.

Both Chobi and Thanatos were using martial arts Diablo wasn’t familiar with, which they’d likely learned with Noah’s help. After all, Noah reincarnated into this world from further into the future than Diablo.

But despite being pushed back, Goldinus of the Gold didn’t show any signs of receiving true damage. It felt like this battle was going to drag on, and that gave Diablo a sinking feeling, like he’d been eating some fruit when he suddenly bit down on something hard...

But he didn’t have time to ponder about this.

“Let’s go!” Noah ordered him.

“Ugh...” Diablo grimaced with displeasure.

“Diablo, the Demon Lord won’t be satisfied if you stay behind,” Noah told him.

“Well...”

Klem was the one who insisted Diablo had to be there when they fought the Emperor. It really would be meaningless if he stayed behind.

“My read on the situation is that the enemy’s trying to split us up,” Noah continued.

“I’d imagine,” Diablo replied as if it were obvious.

But despite his words, he was unfamiliar with fighting in a group. He hadn’t really considered the possibility the enemy would want to divide their forces.

Noah then approached him and whispered into his ear. “Diablo, Diablo. Have you forgotten your promise to me? You said you’d obey me.”

“I-I know!” Diablo said hurriedly.

“And while I’d like nothing more than to tear that annoying woman’s hair out, I do understand the situation. I promise we’ll save her.”

“Seriously?”

“I assure you, Chobi and Thanatos are even more adept at saving people than you are.”

“...Well, I am a Demon Lord, after all.”

He had no experience in playing in a party, so he certainly wasn’t used to helping people in combat. And so, the planned course of action was to leave this place to Chobi and Thanatos and go on ahead — regardless of if they were winning or losing this fight.

This was the kind of decision-making that was necessary when one fought with others. And while this was a situation Diablo wasn’t familiar with from how he usually played games, it wasn’t uncommon to see this happen in stories.

“Leave this place to me and go ahead!” Thanatos shouted.

“That was the plan to begin with, Thanatos,” Chobi said sarcastically.

“Now’s not the time for your boorish quips, Chobi!” he snapped back at her. “I’m feeling quite dashing right now! See, this is why women are terrible. You just don’t get it...”

“Say that too many times and we’ll see who ‘gets it’...”

Thanatos didn’t make it seem like he was making a tragic sacrifice by staying behind — perhaps owing to his personality. And if Noah picked him for this role while taking that aspect of his character into play, then her planning was, indeed, pretty impressive.

Diablo turned his back to them and ran off. He couldn’t shake off that bad feeling he had about Goldinus, but leaving behind words of encouragement wouldn’t be very Demon Lord-ly of him.

“...I’m counting on you,” he whispered under his breath.

Before long, he ran into a small, open iron door. It was probably a side entrance into the castle. With Aira’s guidance, Diablo and the others finally made it into the interior of the Magimatic Castle Viovix.

†

As they closed the iron door behind them, the din of the rain and the echoes of the battle outside died down. Diablo blasted through a few walls and floors, and they continued straight ahead. The walls and floors seemed to be made of stone, but such a gigantic moving castle couldn’t possibly be stonework. It was probably some kind of product of magimatic technology.

The corridors were mostly dark, likely since the Magi Guards didn’t need light to fight. Utata lit up their direct path using a spell or a magical lantern, but the long corridors were still mostly dark. Countless enemies rushed in on their position from out of the darkness, and their shadows weren’t humanoid. They had beast-like and insect-like forms, but they were still Magi Guards.

The Magi Guards attacked, growling all the while.

“Aaaaaaaaah, let’s goooo!” Alan was the first to pounce.

He swept through countless enemies, cleaving open a path. His berserker-like

passion for battle granted him limitless stamina and willpower, and his skill was high to match. He wielded a longsword Diablo had never seen before that seemed to slash into the enemy regardless of how far from him they were. The Magi Guards scattered like crushed, dry leaves in the wind.

Standing at his back, the Demon magi-gunner Daisy offered Alan covering fire.

“《Umbrella Shot》!”

Her martial art unleashed the gun’s bullets in a scatter shot that gouged multiple enemies at once. And despite the bullets scattering in all directions, none of them so much as skimmed Alan. Diablo couldn’t tell if it was some kind of special effect of her weapon or her own skills at play.

Standing even farther back was the Grasswalker sorceress Utata, who granted them multiple buffs.

“《Barrier》! 《Penetration》!”

In terms of class, she was the same type of sorcerer as Sylvie — an enchanter.

Since he was part of their party, it meant all her enchantments targeted Diablo as well, but his 《Demon Lord’s Ring》 ended up reflecting all the effects back to Utata.

He couldn’t help but feel pathetic. Between Alan, Daisy, and Utata, this party was powerful enough as it was. Each of them was strong individually, and on top of that, they covered for each other’s weak spots and were perfectly coordinated. He’d never seen such a well-organized party in *Cross Reverie*. And without even noticing it, he was leaving all the enemies to them, when—

“Lady Noah?!” Daisy called out.

One of the Magi Guards she failed to shoot down rushed in Noah’s direction, one of its wings missing. Standing next to her, Diablo held up 《Tenma’s Staff》. Firing a spell would be simple, but Noah was — or at least said she was — a level 300 sorcerer.

Was there really any point in shielding her from such a weak enemy?

But while Diablo was questioning himself, the enemy reached them, and—

“Insolent fool!” Maximum roared out a battle cry.

He looked like an orderly bank employee, except his head sat on a macho body full of rippling muscles. He easily swung a two-handed sword, not so much slashing the Magi Guard as much as bashing it away with the side of the blade like a tennis ball. The blow crushed it to bits.

“Are you unharmed, Lady Noah?” Maximum asked her.

“Of course, Max,” she nodded with a collected expression.

—Like I thought, he’s a high-level power-type warrior.

But as Diablo looked on from the side like none of this had anything to do with him, Noah spoke to him with a cold tone.

“I see you’re the kind who can’t act without explicit orders.”

—Ugh?!

That wasn’t the case at all, but he wasn’t sure what his role was in the party...and if no one told him what exactly he was supposed to do, he’d stay clueless. Still, a Demon Lord couldn’t exactly ask for orders.

“Hmph...” Diablo retorted haughtily. “I shouldn’t have to spare any effort on slaying such weak enemies!”

“Listen, I’ll issue orders if it’s necessary, but I need you to act voluntarily and adapt to the situation. There’s no end to how many things we’ll have to look out for here.”

He felt like he was a new worker being scolded by a senior. Diablo felt his stomach shrink and go in knots. Klem didn’t do anything either, after all. But just as that thought crossed his mind—

A wave of heat hit Diablo from behind, making him stagger forward. Turning around, he saw Klem unleash some kind of flashy attack. Apparently she’d run into a trap, prompting a spiky wall to close in on them, but now it was melting like hard candy. Klem’s right hand was enveloped in a glow of magical energy.

“Hmhm... I remembered I could use it, so I tried casting 《World Halation》, but it looks like I shouldn’t use that when there are allies around...”

Indeed, the force of the spell she just used was so powerful that anyone unlucky enough to be caught in its range wouldn’t come out unscathed.

“Oooh, Demon Lord!” Edelgard called out, seemingly moved to tears. “So, wonder, ful! Wonder? Wonderful!”

Looking at this now, Diablo noted to himself they actually made for quite the large group, including their guide, Aira. Said Aira was gawking at Klem, her eyes wide with shock.

“I believe this device was meant to kill intruders, but... I can’t believe you destroyed it before we even needed to stop it!”

“I am a Demon Lord, after all!” Klem said boastfully.

Edelgard clapped excitedly.

They seriously don’t need me here, do they...? Diablo wondered to himself.

†

Up until now, Diablo had been forced into situations where he had had no choice but to fight. But now, Klem was here. And there was even a level 300 sorceress right next to him, though he hadn’t seen her cast any spells yet.

Which reminded him — Gewalt wasn’t here, but he thought he saw him fighting earlier before they invaded the castle. Was he still fighting down in the capital? Did he get lost? Or maybe, being the selfish person he was, he decided he wasn’t interested in this fight.

But Gewalt aside... Diablo had no place here.

—Do they think I’m just a burden? That I’m getting in the way?

He had no way of knowing what everyone else was thinking, but the moment he started suspecting they looked down on him, he couldn’t escape the fear that he was right. He was always a socially crippled shut-in gamer. Being cooperative or helpful was never in his nature.

—I wanna go home...

“This castle is massive; we don’t have time to go through it slowly,” Noah told Aira. “Do you know where the Emperor is?”

“Of course. I don’t want to waste any more time either. There’s a long trench ahead. If we go down there, we should reach the Emperor’s throne. And the

distance shouldn't be that—”

“Good, show us the way.”

“Over here!”

Aira led them unflinchingly through the branching corridors. Everything seemed to be going well. So well that it was boring.

Diablo thought that, after all his adventures with Rem, Shera, and the others, he'd gotten a bit more used to playing in a party. This made him expect he'd do a bit better this time around. But he wasn't doing any better. It felt every bit as awkward as the times he tried to play with other players.

“Ugh, I've had enough,” Diablo sighed for what felt like the umpteenth time that day. “I'll just keep going by myself...”

It was then that he saw something shine farther into the dark corridor. Diablo felt a chill go down his spine.

“Huh?!”

Then he heard a blunt noise and the sound of tearing flesh. One of the party members collapsed loudly. It was the Kobold girl, Aira, crimson blood gushing from her chest.

“Kah, nngah?!” she gargled.

Alan, Daisy, Utata, and Noah stood shocked. Maximum moved ahead to guard Noah from any danger while Edelgard jumped ahead of Klem to protect her.

You idiots!

Diablo chose a different course of action.

“《Diamond Dust》!”

Countless blocks of ice whizzed through the corridor, rushing into the darkness like a barrage of frozen knives. What enemy was he up against? What kind of attack did they launch? Diablo didn't know, but it was clear he was up against a high-level threat. He didn't have time to investigate and think it over.

—*What good would panicking and freezing up do?!*

Alan was the first to come to. He stood up with his sword at the ready, his

eyes burning with anger.

“You did it now, you bastards!”

He rushed forward, his body enveloped with a shining aura. A charge-type martial art that used his stamina points — in other words, an Outglow. It looked reckless at first, but a vanguard’s job was to tank the enemy’s attacks. He was effectively playing by the book.

Diablo clicked his tongue, though.

We wouldn’t be seeing weak enemies this late into the game, would we?

If this were the MMORPG, this was the time a strong enemy would pop out — probably one too strong for Alan to handle on his own. And this world wasn’t a game; it was cold, hard reality. It didn’t have to conform to genre conventions.

This is a dangerous opponent!

The light of Alan’s martial art dispelled the darkness, revealing a large wall of red, writhing flesh.

—Is this some kind of serpent? A worm? No...

Diablo recognized this, but not from the game. It was the same thing that filled the Magimatic Sol’s cockpit. The tentacles.

—That’s the Emperor!

Had he shouted it, would it have changed what happened next?

“Gaaah?!” Alan screamed as his right arm went flying into the air.

The floor was dyed red with blood. Daisy screamed and started firing her magi-gun haphazardly. Her shots produced a few flashy explosions...but they didn’t seem to deal any damage to the tentacles.

Calm down! Diablo thought angrily. *Bullets on that level wouldn’t even faze it! Can’t you tell he has magic resistance?!*

The Diamond Dust spell he’d sent earlier didn’t seem to deal any damage to it either. In other words, spells below level 70 wouldn’t work on it. This was something Diablo expected, though. The Shadow they faced earlier and the Magimatic Sols all had considerable magic resistance.

—*If I'm going to get enough firepower to burn the Emperor's tentacles away... I'll need time to charge my spell.*

Letting Alan and the others die would buy him that time. But letting them die would mean...

"Tch!" Diablo grit his teeth. "This is why I can't stand fighting in parties!"

Diablo charged the enemy. He could use contact-based spells without having to chant and charge. The number of tentacles reaching out from the darkness was...progressively growing. A few of them were reduced to piles of flesh and littered the ground, likely the result of Alan's slash.

Alan was now kneeling on the ground, his arm missing. Countless tentacles extended toward him, like the gigantic wall of flesh was closing in on him.

"Goddammit!" Alan thrust out his left fist.

His fist shone, knocking the tentacles away. But knocking a few of them away didn't really make much of a difference. More reached out from the darkness, as if to compensate for the ones that were destroyed. It looked like they might envelop him entirely.

"Aaaaah?!" he shouted.

—*Damn brat.*

His stats were high, but he had zero understanding of strategy. Didn't he know how to fight those kinds of enemies? Diablo quickly closed the distance between them using 《Sword Smite III》 and thrust Tenma's Staff at the tentacles.

"《Matoi Izuna》!"

The wall of tentacles let out a voiceless howl, shuddering.

Matoi Izuna was a spell that surged electricity through its target. It had the significant limitation of requiring that the caster touch the target directly, but its firepower was considerable. And as Diablo had demonstrated over the course of his many adventures, in situations where there were multiple enemies, the spell could spread to other enemies in a group through physical contact. On top of that, the spell rattled the enemy from within, yielding a

passive, continual damage effect that could induce paralysis.

A sorcerer risking physical contact with an enemy was a gamble that could very well cost one their life. But this spell's effects were potent and powerful enough to warrant using it.

Some of the tentacles were shredded to bits and crumbled to the ground. While the enemy remained stunned, Alan fell back to the rest of the group. It seemed he wasn't stupid enough to continue fighting recklessly.

†

"Captain, it's crazy strong!" Alan fell back, clutching his wounded shoulder.

"You were careless, you idiot!" Maximum shouted, landing an iron fist on Alan's head.

"Ngh!" The argent-haired Dwarf fell face-first on the floor.

For a moment, Diablo had to wonder if that punch finished him off...but Alan soon hopped back to his feet with a smile.

"That hit the spot!"

Much to Diablo's surprise, Alan's right arm was completely whole and healed. His gauntlet was crushed and he'd lost his sword, but his body was back to normal.

—Is Maximum a Healer?! He looks more like a strength-based warrior...!

The fact that he could restore a missing limb put him on the same level as the High Priest. Aira was standing next to them, and the last time he saw her, she was gushing blood from her chest. It looked like a fatal injury, but now she was cradled in Noah's arms, awfully pale but still alive.

"Ugh... I'm sorry..." she moaned. "I didn't think the Emperor's grasp reached this place too..."

"Would burning those tentacles defeat the Emperor?" Noah asked her.

Aira shook her head.

"That's just a detached part of the Emperor, like the ones that fill the Magimatic Sols. You can destroy a detachment, but it won't deal any damage to

the real thing.”

“...And it’s still this strong,” Noah muttered bitterly.

“But a detached tentacle shouldn’t have that much individual power,” Aira added. “That means it should lead us directly to the Emperor.”

“It’s risky, but we’ll have to act on that,” Noah nodded pensively.

But they weren’t in a position where they could take their time. Matoi Izuna had turned most of the tentacles into charred flesh, but there were more and more tendrils extending from the darkness. Diablo felt like he was plunging into a den of snakes.

“《Flare Burst》! 《Rock Cannon》!”

Diablo shot the fleshy tentacles extending toward him with high-firepower spells, but they kept coming out faster than he could destroy them. Daisy and Utata drew back, but Diablo snapped at them.

“Don’t let the ones in the front distract you!”

“Huh?!” Utata wheeled around...but there was nothing there.

However, the next moment, tentacles fell down on them from above. Just as it seemed like they would crush the party, a white flash blotted them out.

“《Infinity Detonation》!” Klem cast one of her many spells, the light of which was dazzling to behold. Her power was every bit as overwhelming as a real Demon Lord’s should be. After all, she was Krebskulm, the strongest of them all. And despite not being in her true form, she was still this powerful...

Alan picked up his sword and removed it from the grip of his old severed arm. With this, he’d regained his position as vanguard.

Klem was keeping watch for above and behind them, while Diablo was roasting the tentacles rushing in from their flanks. With Alan, Daisy, and Utata regaining their composure, they were able to stabilize their ranks again. So long as they remained calm, their fighting potential was high.

“So we’re supposed to follow these things back to their source, right?!” Alan shouted. “Let’s cut them down as we go!”

It was a difficult but certain way to get to the boss. They moved ahead gradually, cutting the tentacles down faster than they could regenerate...but they were being careless with respect to a certain attack they'd seen earlier. Diablo felt a sense of panic creep in.

—Don't tell me they haven't noticed.

"Alan!" Noah shouted. "There should be an enemy capable of ranged attacks! Watch out for any you might run into!"

"Oh, right!"

The flash in the darkness that gouged into Aira's chest — some enemy had to have fired that attack.

But Diablo ended up raising his voice despite himself.

"No! You're wrong!"

"What are you saying, you fools?!" Klem scolded Noah at the same time as Diablo spoke. "A tentacle fired that attack! Weren't you looking?!"

"Huh?!"

Alan and Noah were shocked at this chiding. It attacked too quickly for them to see what had really happened. It was so sudden that by the time Diablo had noticed it, the attack had already reached Aira. The answer was fairly obvious once he thought about it.

—They're tentacles! Of course they'd fire something out of their tips!

It was cliché.

The tentacles all around them parted open and unleashed beams of light. Instead of telling everyone else to be careful, Diablo cast a spell.

"《Prism Wall》!"

This formed a powerful barrier that successfully blocked off an attack from one direction, but there were still shots coming at them from everywhere else. The countless tentacles around them fired white, cloudy bullets at them — the same color as the nerve connection threads used to link a Magimatic Sol to its pilot's consciousness.

Alan cut down the shots headed for him. So long as he remained focused, he could handle this. But he was a high-level warrior, and the rest of the party was not. He could hear screaming from the other members.

“Gyah?!”

“Nng!”

Blood spurted through the air.

“Captain, they got Utata and Daisy!” Alan called for help.

“U-Ugh...”

But Maximum was kneeling on the floor, his greatsword cracked and his body bloodied from having to shield Noah. Diablo had healing potions, so he could give one to Maximum, who would go on to heal Daisy and Utata...

But while that thought did cross his mind, he didn't have the time or the presence of mind to actually do it. He had a flurry of attacks coming his way that he had to block.

—How long can they keep shooting us for?!

It seemed the Emperor intentionally went easy on them to lure them deeper into his lair. Daisy and Utata were too injured to move, and Alan was shielding them from any further shots, but his stamina was limited. There were only a few seconds left before Daisy's enchantments would run out, and Maximum had his hands full defending Aira and Noah.

The attacks were gradually chipping away at their HP. More tentacles slithered in around them, increasing the rate of fire.

It was then that Klem counterattacked. She never was one to remain passive.

“This Demon Lord will fry you to a crisp! 《Thunder Storm》!”

This was a spell Krebskulm used once when Diablo fought her in her complete form. Countless bolts of lightning would sizzle through the air, electrocuting the enemy. However, if she were to blast away all the tentacles at once, more would emerge to attack them, but it would grant them the time they needed to heal or retreat.

While this was an appropriate decision, there was one thing Klem was overlooking. Diablo tried to shout a warning at her...but the rumbling of thunder blotted out his words.

“Some of them resist lightning!”

After fighting them for some time, Diablo realized each individual tentacle had its own unique elemental affinities and resistances. The tentacles all looked roughly the same, but each one must have been imbued with either earth, wind, fire, water, light or darkness.

Lightning element attacks were light spells with a fire attribute. They would deal double damage to tentacles with the wind or darkness attributes, but dealt reduced damage to any with the water attribute — meaning they would survive the spell.

Worse yet, using such a high-firepower spell meant the caster would have a longer cooldown after casting it. And if the enemy were to make use of that opening...

One thick tentacle extended toward Klem. Its tip was wide open, revealing three large fangs. It screeched as it lunged at her.

“You dare to try and eat this Demon Lord...?! ”

But someone jumped to Klem’s rescue — the spear-wielding Fallen, Edelgard.

“Demon Lord!” she shouted as she gouged her spear into the fanged tentacle with a powerful blow.

An explosion boomed in Diablo’s ears. Edelgard’s martial art blasted the tentacle into fragments of flesh. It was a reckless attack that didn’t take defense in mind. The remaining tentacles spewed their bullets at Edelgard in concentrated fire.

“Agh?! Kh?! Ngaaah?! ”

After taking a few direct hits, Edelgard was blown back. Her scaly skin cracked like pottery and fragments of her hard flesh flew through the air.

“Edelgard!” Klem screeched.

“This party...is gonna get wiped out,” Diablo whispered to himself with painful

clarity, his heart sinking.

He'd slain many challengers in his days, so he'd seen this happen time and time again. The more members that fell off, the harder it became for a party to regain its footing.

Klem's spell had destroyed all of the tentacles except for the water element ones, so Diablo fired an earth spell to sweep them away. But before he could do anything else, more were already extending toward them.

There was no breaking this deadlock. It felt like a foregone conclusion to him that they would wipe here.

But it was then that Noah seemed to make a decision. She raised her hands up to the air and chanted.

“《Grand Crash》!”

It was a spell Diablo didn't know. Noah was a level 300 elemental sorcerer, and back when Diablo played the game, level 150 was the upper level limit any character could reach. Noah, however, played the game in a different time period. She then thrust her hands down to the ground and unleashed her high-level magic.

The floor, which seemed to have been made out of some magimatic material resembling concrete, cracked beneath them, and the stonework under Diablo's feet disappeared. It was as if the floor was never there to begin with, like a fissure had been torn through the world itself. Noah and the rest of the party were now falling.

—*Did she fumble the spell...?*

Apparently not; this seemed to be exactly her intent. That was her only way of pulling everyone out of the death trap at once.

“Everyone, I give you an absolute order!” Noah shouted. “No matter what, don't die!”

Maximum plummeted down, holding her and Aira in his arms. Alan, Daisy, and Utata were falling too...but they didn't scream, or even respond.

—*Are they still alive?!*

Klem fell as well, holding onto Edelgard's limp form.

Chapter 2: Coming Face to Face with It

Diablo used his 《Flight》 magic. His EX rank boots, the 《Empty Sky's Gambol》, allowed him to effortlessly land on solid ground.

He looked up at the castle wordlessly. Noah's spell seemed to have torn the Magimatic Castle Viovix apart. The fissure expanded and branched off, and by now it was impossible to see where the rest of the group had fallen. He could only hope they were fine. Between having to evade the falling rubble and the tentacles pursuing them, he couldn't keep his attention fixed on anyone else.

—I only protected two of them.

No... Only one of them. He couldn't say he protected both.

Diablo reflexively grabbed onto Klem's hand in mid-fall, and she had her arms wrapped around Edelgard.

Or rather, Edelgard's *top half*.

Everything below her stomach was missing.

"De...mon...Lord..." Edelgard said with a dry, fading voice that didn't sound anything like her.

"Edelgard...!" Klem looked utterly shocked.

"Are you...un...harm...ed...?"

"Thanks to you, I'm completely fine!"

"That's...gooo...d..."

"You can't disappear!" Klem glared at her aggressively. "I won't allow it, Edelgard! You're this Demon Lord's only subordinate!"

Edelgard's lips hung open limply.

"I won't let you disappear, understood?!"

"...Y...Yes..."

Edelgard's body began crumbling into particles of light — the mark of a Fallen dying. Diablo felt his heart throb painfully. He'd eaten with her, traveled with her... She may have been a Fallen, but she was neither stranger nor enemy.

And the Edelgard he knew as a friend was...crumbling away...



Klem spread her hands, pulling the particles together, as if trying to hold them close to her heart.

“Edelgard... I won’t let you disappear...”

And then Diablo heard a gentle chime, like a bell.

—*What?!*

He looked around in shock. There was rubble all around them, making the place look like a ruin. All of this rubble likely came falling down from the castle, but the place they were in was probably originally some kind of wide cavern.

The sunlight didn’t extend to here, making it difficult to discern exactly what kind of place they were in...but at least there were no enemies in sight. He couldn’t hear tentacles slithering or the sound of Magi Guard engines. All he could hear was that gentle, bell-like chiming.

“What is that sound...?”

Klem opened her hands, revealing a small, sleek, azure bell.

“...It’s Edelgard,” she said.

“Huh? You don’t mean... She’s... Really?!”

“It should be her. I’ve never tried doing this before, so I don’t know if it even means anything.”

She turned a Fallen on the verge of death into a...bell? Diablo had never seen that kind of event in *Cross Reverie*. Could a Demon Lord really do that?

“I leave her in your hands, Diablo,” Klem said, handing the bell over to him. “If this Demon Lord hangs on to it, I might end up breaking it.”

After a moment of wavering, Diablo accepted it. It reminded him of the color of Edelgard’s eyes. He stored it in his back pouch — a magical item that, despite its small size, was spacious enough to store a large number of items.

“So Edelgard wasn’t destroyed?”

“Given enough time, magical energy, and the right place, she could be restored — at least, that’s what this Demon Lord believes...”

“Hm?”

That was vague.

“I’ve never tried it, so I don’t know,” Klem said, grimacing. “Fallen just gather around me, but they’re not of much use... At least, this Demon Lord used to be indifferent to them at the time, so I didn’t care.”

“Really?”

“Remember how Modinaram consumed the other Fallen?”

“Right, he did.”

When the Demon Overlord Modinaram was backed against the wall, it began consuming the rest of the Demon Lord’s Army to replenish his lost magical energy. He only saw them as emergency rations. Apparently, Krebskulm saw the Fallen in the same light in the past.

“I’ve kept her soul earthbound so it won’t disappear,” Klem continued. “It’s the first time I’ve thought to do that with a Fallen.”

“Edelgard is special to you, after all.”

“Yes! She buys this Demon Lord biscuits! Ahaha!” Klem laughed jokingly.

This girl wasn’t the Demon Lord she used to be. She wouldn’t kill the mortal races for no reason, and she treated those around her with kindness and affection. The peaceful days she’d spent living in Faltra had changed her.

†

“Mmmm. There’s something else that I need to try for the first time,” Klem said, scratching her head roughly.

“What is it?”

“At this rate, we won’t beat the Emperor.”

“...So you can tell.”

“I am a Demon Lord, after all,” Klem said as she began walking ahead.

They were surrounded by rubble, and Diablo had no idea where they currently were. Admitting he didn’t know which way to go wouldn’t be very

Demon Lord-ly of him, though. Of course, Klem probably knew Diablo's true identity, so that wasn't so much of a problem.

But if he didn't act like a Demon Lord, he couldn't speak properly. This was a limitation inherent to his personality, and had nothing to do with whether acting that way would improve or worsen his position.

And so, Diablo simply walked beside her, acting as if he obviously knew where she was going.

"Hmph... We're up against someone who could build that castle, leads an army of Magimatic Sols, and can wipe out a city in the blink of an eye," Diablo said. "We wouldn't beat him by just charging in blindly."

"Noah and her group were careless," Klem agreed.

"...I just hope she's still alive," Diablo muttered. "We still need to ask her how she was going to beat the Emperor."

"I thought you could beat him if you fought seriously, though," Klem said.

"Huh?"

That was surprisingly high praise. It was a long while ago, but Diablo did defeat a partially awakened Demon Lord Krebskulm in battle. It was throwing a childish tantrum, which gave Diablo the time he needed to prepare an 《Apocalypse Abyss》 spell. That spell had a wide area of effect, which meant that its efficacy wasn't as focused. It could work if Diablo knew exactly where the Emperor was, and the Emperor stayed there until he shot the spell, but...

"Emperor Gelmed isn't a child or a mindless beast. When we entered his castle, he pretended to be overwhelmed so he could lure us in and attack us from all directions at once. The spell I used on you back then wouldn't be useful against someone that smart."

"I'm not saying that because I saw you cast that one spell. Besides, in terms of firepower, Noah's spells are stronger than yours."

"Mm? Nng... Well, I... No! I am a Demon Lord from another world! If I were to take this battle seriously, I'd be that much stronger! But my power would be too great, and could end up shattering the very fabric of this world!"

“This world...” Klem repeated pensively.

Ugh! Diablo realized a moment too late. *Would a Demon Lord worry about destroying the world?!*

He could imagine Klem sneering at him and calling him a kind Demon Lord.

“Ah, no!” Diablo denied what he’d just said, flustered. “I don’t actually care if the fabric of this world were to shatter! I am a Demon Lord, after all! And so, erm—”

“We should take any option possible, so long as it destroys the Emperor,” Klem said. “We must destroy that one at all costs.”

“Hm...”

“Because if we don’t, he will cover all worlds with his disgusting flesh,” Klem said clearly, walking through the darkness.

This made Diablo certain of something.

“Klem, what do you know about the Emperor?”

“I once fought someone with the same ability as it.”

“What?!”

Klem sniffled and grimaced.

“Such a horrible stench.”

“Hm?” Diablo tried sniffing the air too, but he didn’t smell anything.

He did recall Klem making a fuss about smell before. When she met Lumachina, she complained that she “smelled like God.”

There was something shining ahead of them. Diablo followed Klem and approached it. He felt something uncomfortable brew in his chest.

“It gives me a bad feeling,” Klem said unpleasantly, her thick tail slamming restlessly against the ground. “I can hardly recognize it now, but I can tell by the smell.”

Ahead of them was a boulder. And on it was a child...or rather, the crucified remains of a child. The child’s chest was gouged with a long lance. It had an

impudent face and clown makeup, but its skin was dry and scorched, making it difficult to discern what they looked like before. It lacked its eyeballs, and its lips were cut off, as were some of its fingers and assorted parts of its body.

It was a corpse. A child's corpse. And worse yet, Diablo felt like it was oddly, eerily familiar. Did he meet this child somewhere before?

"...What...is this...?" Diablo asked.

"It's God," Klem said with a shrug.

Diablo looked at Klem, his eyes wide.

"You don't mean...?!"

"The world exists within a stream of countless possibilities. There are futures where this one is free to do as it pleases, and some where It's reduced to a mutilated body. If the Emperor has the power to surpass God, then God's future could very well change. It's not all that surprising, is it?"

"No, no no no... It can't be... Emperor Gelmed did this to *God*?!"

"Well, this whelp fooled around a little too much. This Demon Lord thought I'd kill it myself, but someone beat me to the punch."

"So God was...killed...?!"

And it was the Emperor who killed him.

Klem looked at the lance gouged into the child's body. It was a long, old wooden spear. Nothing about it looked all that mystical or strong, but...

"This is the 《Lance of Helvetia》, capable of distorting the laws of destiny. An Adh Artifact unfettered by the bounds of Akasha, that was brought here from another world. In other words, this is a Demon and God Slayer."

†

Klem gazed at the corpse and heaved a sigh.

"He could have just crucified It... But the Emperor wanted God's miracles, and so he stole Its flesh."

"That's a curse," Diablo said.

“You’re a perceptive one,” Klem remarked.

—*Yeah, well, it’s a fantasy cliché!*

He who consumes the flesh of God is cursed with supernatural power.

“He defeated God and changed the future in doing so,” Klem said, crossing her arms. “But if you and Rem desire a better future for the mortal races... A future that isn’t extinction... You must defeat the Emperor.”

Diablo felt his mind gradually calm down. He thought back to Rem and Shera, and about why he even came to this place.

—*I want to protect them.*

“So Emperor Gelmed’s power is the power of God?”

“Aye!” Klem nodded firmly.

“Then won’t this lance work against him? This...Lance of Helvetia.”

“Mmm... One of the mortal races could wield it... But if a God or a Fallen tries to touch it, it steals away the majority of our powers.”

Diablo was stunned.

“So you’re saying that...you have to be from the mortal races to use this thing?”

“Yes. I mean, it’s called the Demon and God Slayer! Are you going to try to use it, Diablo?”

Diablo pondered on it for a moment, but...

“...What are you saying?! I am a Demon Lord!”

He couldn’t discard his role playing. It was his role because he stuck to it through thick and thin. Even if he was faced with the rarest, most powerful, one-of-a-kind weapon.

...Some part of him wept bitter tears at the missed opportunity, though.

Klem, however, nodded grandly.

“Do not worry! If we’re up against the Emperor, this Demon Lord’s power can overcome him! But when I unleash my power, my destructive impulses get

stronger...”

“Like when you fought me?”

“I’ll be even more difficult to beat this time around, that’s for certain. I remember how to fight properly now.”

“Nng...” Diablo groaned, recalling the powerful spells he saw Klem cast.

He couldn’t see himself soloing her.

“Modinaram broke his own limits and grew stronger by consuming the other Demon Lords. That put him closer to the power of the 《Primordial Demon Lord》.”

“Yes, I remember him saying something like that.”

—*The Ultimate Demon Lord, approaching the power of the Primordial Demon Lord... Something like that.*

“Right now, I’m even stronger than Modinaram was back then.”

“R-Really?”

If a stronger enemy than the Demon Overlord Modinaram were to appear right now, Diablo didn’t know how he’d be able to handle it. Klem extended her hand out to Diablo. Her small, child-like hand touched his chest. It felt nice and cool to the touch.

“Then I shall grant you the power of the Demon Lord.”

“What?!”

This was what Klem meant when she said she “needs to try something for the first time.”

“Don’t tell me you’re cowering now after everything that’s happened...?” Klem glared at him.

“O-Of course not!” Diablo replied indignantly.

“Good!” she said with a smile. “That’s how Diablo, the Demon Lord from another world, ought to conduct himself!”

Something about the way she was acting felt off.

—*I guess that makes sense.*

Losing here could spell the end of the world. The Emperor wielded and was cursed by the power of God, and he could consume all of creation. And to oppose him, he'd need to rely on the power of the Demon Lord Krebskulm.

“And you’ve never tried this before?”

“The only thing I ever thought about before was killing the mortal races. I never imagined I’d give them my power.”

Diablo almost asked her “Can you really do it?” but ended up swallowing the words. It was her first try. She said she wasn’t sure, so pressing her on it wouldn’t move things along either way. He said something else instead.

“Demon Lord Klem! As a fellow Demon Lord, I shall use your power wisely! For the crime of intruding upon our territory, I shall etch true fear into Emperor Gelmed’s heart. I will strike him down, and any vestiges of God’s power he possesses!”

“Encouraging words. That is why you are worthy of being this Demon Lord’s master!” Klem spread her arms, beaming at him.

What little, scant armor covered her body vanished, leaving her completely naked.

“Nng?!” Diablo gawked at her.

“I leave it all...in your hands, Diablo...”

Klem levitated above him and brought her lips closer to his.

“Aaah?!” Diablo squeaked despite himself.

But her voice filled his head, as if washing over his mind...

“I declare in the name of Krebskulm. All of this Demon Lord’s powers shall answer Diablo, reside in Diablo, and obey Diablo.”

“Kle—”

A pair of small lips sealed Diablo’s.

“Mm...”

They felt soft and hot against his own. Klem's body heat was gradually becoming vividly clear to him. He felt a swift heartbeat, and the swirling of overflowing magical energy.

"Mha..."

His mind felt numb. His consciousness receded, but just as he was about to let go of it, he was pulled back.

"Ugh..."

"Mm..."

"...Klem... Are you sure this is...necessary...?"

"Mm... I don't know."

"Hey."

She chuckled, amused by his momentary annoyance.

"Let me have this. This might be the last sight this Demon Lord ever sees."

"Wh-What?"

"Take care of Edelgard."

"W-Wait! Klem! I don't need the Demon Lord's power if it means losing you...!"

"Heheh. You're too kind to be a Demon Lord."

Those last words only rang in his mind. The moment he wrapped his arms around her, Klem's body disappeared, as if melting into Diablo's.

"Ah?! Aaaaaaah, aaaaaaaaaaah...!"

A voice he couldn't even recognize as his own erupted from his lips. Magical energy surged up from the core of his body. Something enveloped him, a metallic sort of sensation — armor that was lighter than any clothing he'd ever worn.

Diablo fell to his knees and bashed his now armored fist against the ground. Klem was nowhere to be seen.

—She's gone!

Diablo’s shoulders quaked. Something warm built up in his eyes.

“You stupid idiot... If it means losing you... I don’t need this power! I could do it without this! I’d defeat the Emperor, I’d defeat anyone else if I had to! Don’t just give me your power and disappear like that... Why... Why...?!
Aaaaaaaaah!”

There was no one left to answer his call. And yet, he screamed.

“Kleeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeem!”

†

Meanwhile, elsewhere...

“...Nn...”

“...ah—”

“...Mm.”

“...ah! ...dy Noah!”

“...Huh?”

“Lady Noah!”

Feeling someone shake her body, Noah’s consciousness finally surfaced. She sat up at once.

“Ah! I’m not sleeping! I’m not! I’m almost done filing those documents—”

Her hands blindly fumbled around, but the only thing she felt was the cold floor. Her fingers then slid over fabric, and she found that there was a thick cloak spread under her body. She turned her gaze upward, only to see Maximum gazing into her face, concerned. Utata and Daisy were behind him, visibly surprised.

“Did you just speak in some foreign language...?” Maximum asked her.

Noah felt her cheeks grow hot, then cleared her throat and spoke in the language of Lyferia.

“...Is everyone all right?”

“Yes. At least, *we’re* fine,” Maximum replied. “We don’t know where the Demon Lord, the Fallen, or Diablo ended up.”

Losing the Demon Lord was a big blow to their combat potential. The Fallen was simply her lackey, Diablo was opposed to teaming up, and Gewalt disappeared somewhere around the time they infiltrated the castle.

“...What about Alan?” Noah looked around.

Maximum’s expression clouded over while Daisy sighed. They didn’t lose their strongest fighter, did they?! No, based on what Maximum had just said...

She heard the footsteps of someone approaching them.

“Hey! I found a passage over that way!”

Alan.

“W-We all tried to stop him!” Daisy said, trying to make excuses. “But that idiot said he’d go on patrol and wouldn’t listen...”

“That’s fine,” Noah replied.

Alan stopped right in front of her.

“Oh, you’re up!” he exclaimed cheerfully.

“...Didn’t I tell you to obey your captain’s orders while I’m away?” she asked him sternly.

“I mean, Maximum was distracted because he was worried about you!” Alan replied defensively. “We kept telling him you were breathing, you weren’t bleeding, and that you were just sleeping, but he just kept going, ‘Lady Noah, Lady Noah.’”

Maximum’s cheeks flushed, “W-Well... Of course I’d be worried about Lady Noah’s well-being.”

“And if we had to wait for you to wake up before we investigated the situation, we’d be on the back foot again!” Alan raised his voice impatiently.

“C-Cut it out, Alan...” Daisy said, slightly distressed. “You’re being too loud. What if the Emperor finds us again?”

“We’re not sneaking thieves!” Alan said, frowning. “We’re here to beat the

Emperor down, right?!”

“...Yeah, but like, we can’t,” Utata grumbled. “We need, like, a force three times our size to beat him head-on.”

“Should we bring more troops then?”

They only chose the Palace Knights’ elites for this mission. There were other soldiers in the Order they could bring, but they were weaker than anyone in this group.

“Bringing more people won’t increase our firepower by much,” Noah shook her head. “Especially not against that type of enemy.”

“Then what do we do, Noah?!” Alan asked.

“Well, we didn’t win, but... This is all within my expectations. We don’t have time on our side, though. We needed to know just how large the Empire’s ranks were and what sort of tactics they’d use.”

“You think we’ll make it next time?”

“Of course.”

But as encouraging as her words were, they couldn’t just forget how they nearly died and were forced to flee. Maximum looked at her anxiously, his loyalty just barely overcoming his fear. It seemed Noah would have to explain herself, but they didn’t have much longer to delay.

“The Emperor attacked us sooner than Aira expected, and she’s familiar with the structure of the castle. He went out of his way to take care of us as soon as possible. In other words, he feels that giving us time is dangerous.”

“I agree,” Aira nodded.

“He wouldn’t have gone out of his way like that if he didn’t feel that we were a threat,” Noah continued. “He pretended like we were taking care of his tentacles effectively to lure us into a trap, and we fell for it, even knowing the risks.”

“Huh, you knew we were going into a trap?!” Daisy asked.

Noah nodded.

“I don’t know how the Emperor was watching or listening in on us, so I didn’t say anything... But if we went about it too carefully while avoiding him, it would have taken us too long to get to the Emperor.”

“Yes.”

“And most importantly, if we broke through his traps, we’d know just how powerful the Emperor is.”

“Oh, I see,” Daisy said, bringing her palms together.

“It’s as you say, Lady Noah,” Maximum nodded in understanding. “He lured us to a spot where the tentacles could surround us and attack us from every direction at once. It was to be fatal, but your magic allowed us to escape.”

“So if the Emperor had some ace up his sleeve, he’s already used it?”

“That makes sense.”

“So we can safely assume the Emperor can’t do anything beyond surrounding us with tentacles.”

“Hm, but those squirmy things are pretty strong, you know?” Alan remarked. “Like, I cut and cut them, but they keep growing back. He’ll just surround us while I’m fighting. I could probably manage for myself, but I can’t cover for the weak ones.”

“The only reason you’re still alive is because a ‘weak one’ buffed you to hell and back with her enchantments~” Utata said teasingly.

“Aaah, that’s not what I meant!”

“And don’t call us weak, call us cute! We’re girls, you blockhead!”

“Get off my case!”

Seeing the conversation was going off course, Noah stopped the two of them from bickering any longer.

“Alan’s right,” she said. “If we could handle the Emperor’s tentacles, we wouldn’t have needed to run.”

“So not even you can beat it?! Then what do we do?!”

“Well, to start, we avoid open spaces where he can surround us. Aira, we’re

counting on you to show us the way.”

“Yes ma’am.” Aira saluted perfectly, as a former soldier would.

“Alan, we’re counting on you to block the attacks from behind.”

“Just that? You got it, chief.”

“I’ll use my magic to dispatch the tentacles coming at us from ahead. Max, you protect me.”

“I’ll guard you with my life,” Maximum nodded.

“Utata and Daisy, back us up like before.”

“Roger dodger~”

“Leave it to me, Lady Noah!”

It couldn’t be called a concrete plan, but they had to act fast. They’d have to power through it.

“All right! We’re gonna have to be quick, so don’t fall behind!” Noah told them.

They all nodded. They went out through the passage Alan found and discovered that they were in an unused warehouse.

†

They moved ahead, Aira showing them the way.

“Take a right turn after this one!”

Since they’d fallen pretty deep into the castle, they were rather close to the Emperor’s position. That only meant the tentacles’ attacks were much more persistent, though.

“《Magma Eruption》!” Noah called out.

The floor became red and melted into glowing magma that seared all the tentacles in their way. A few of them survived due to their elemental affinity, but Daisy swiftly shot them down with her magi-gun. The fact that the tentacles were still alive was evidence that they were aligned with the water element, which resisted fire, so Daisy fired earth element shots to capitalize on this.

She didn't quite stand out within the Palace Knights, but Daisy was a level 130 magi gunner capable of finishing the tentacles with a single blow. She was a match for even Laminitus, the governor of Zircon Tower.

"I did it!"

"Good work, let's keep going!"

While rejoicing at Noah's praise, Daisy kept running ahead with a grave expression. Keeping up with this constant march was the real challenge for her, even more so than the firepower required to keep the tentacles at bay. She was a Demon, a race lacking in muscular strength. Even if she put in the same amount of training as anyone else, her physical growth would never hold up to that of the other races.

Lyferia was a Human supremacist country, and Demons were believed to have mixed their blood with the Fallen. Daisy was driven out of her homeland, and in the midst of despair was saved by Noah. Noah gave her a place to live, her magi-gun, and something to live for.

—If it's for her, I'll fight as much as it takes.

She was a bit surprised when the person she felt so much for revealed herself to be a woman...but that didn't shake Daisy's loyalty one bit. She always had her eyes on Noah. Maximum was exceptionally zealous, and the other members looked up to her with something close to admiration, but Daisy was the most loyal of them all.

She noticed a crack at Noah's feet, and Maximum hadn't moved yet. She moved to warn her verbally, when...

The crack widened, and a tentacle burst from the ground. Its tip parted, revealing a large mouth as it hissed.

"What?!"

"Oh, no...!"

But before Maximum could defend her, Daisy jumped forward. Her magi-gun was already loaded with an elemental bullet, and if the tentacle resisted that, the bullet wouldn't be strong enough to destroy it. And so... Daisy jumped

ahead.

“Lady Noah!”

“Huh?! Da—”

The person she cared for so much called her name...but sadly, she didn't hear it. The last thing she heard was the crunching sound of her skull being crushed.

†

“Daisyyyyyyy!”

Maximum and Alan slashed through the tentacle. It fell limply to the ground where it crumbled into dust like burnt paper and disappeared. All that was left in its wake were Daisy's mangled remains, which were denied any of the beauty she once had in life.

“Come back!” Maximum slammed his 《Healing Fist》 into her.

But nothing happened. Noah was breathing out in labored gasps.

“There's more of them coming!” Utata called out.

Noah hurriedly fired a spell.

“《Ice Age》!”

But the moment she did, the ceiling caved in on them. Maximum jumped aside, holding onto Noah's body. An ominous crunching sound reached Noah's ears, and blood began pooling all around her. He was bleeding from his neck.

“Ugh...”

“Max?!”

“Lady Noah... Are you...unharmmed...?”

“Forget me, you're the one who needs help!”

Maximum began healing himself. The entire situation was going off the rails. Was it because they lost Daisy's fire support? No, it wasn't just that. The tentacles were clearly getting stronger, which probably meant they were approaching the Emperor. After all, up until now, they'd been able to block the enemy so long as they remained cautious, but now they were growing faster,

stronger, and harder to deal with.

—*Do we fall back?*

But what then? If they ran, who would stop the Emperor? He'd just blow the town away when the sun set.

"Don't just stand there, Noah!" Alan screamed, his voice overlapping with the sound of a slash.

The tentacles that swooped down on her from above let out a cacophonous screech and spewed some kind of fluid onto the floor. Yellow smoke rose from it and spread with a foul stench. Thankfully, Noah had resistance to status ailments, but Utata hurriedly covered her mouth before she began vomiting violently.

"It's poison!" Aira exclaimed from the back row.

"Goddammit, hang on!" Alan had poison resistance and used a status recovery potion.

But just then, the tentacles advanced. The number around them had increased since Noah had stopped attacking.

"Kuh... 《Sword Storm》!"

Countless swords made of stone appeared and sliced the tentacles to shreds. Noah turned around, breathing heavily. Utata lay on the ground, still. She looked like she'd just suffocated herself. Alan shivered and grit his teeth bitterly.

"Keep your eyes forward, Alan! There are still enemies coming!" Maximum scolded him.

"I know that! But Utata! She's poisoned!"

"It's too late! If you don't keep fighting, you'll be the next one to die! She knew what she was getting into! We all made an oath, didn't we?! To protect Lady Noah!"

"Goddammiiiiit!" Alan charged ahead.

Whenever Alan lost his temper, he became uncontrollable. Noah doubted

he'd hear her orders anymore. She didn't intend to stop him though — they weren't making any headway by going about this conventionally. Alan slashed all the enemies in his way in a blind rage while Noah and the others bolted after him.

More tentacles soon extended to intercept them, but were promptly cut down. Others began firing at them, but Alan swiftly dodged, clearing them away and continuing to sprint ahead without losing any momentum.

“Aaaaaaagh!” he howled like an animal.

However, he couldn't possibly block every attack, and the damage gradually built up. Bones snapped, organs were crushed, and his blood spilled, but even so, Alan never stopped. He kept swinging his blade.

“Araaaaaaaaaaaaaah!”

Noah's lips curled up into a smile. He was acting the way she'd hoped he would. He'd cut down countless tentacles... And toward the end of his rampage, he was faced with something that wasn't so much a mess of tentacles as it was a wall of flesh. But he broke through it, and quite literally cleaved a way open for them.

†

They stepped out into a spacious area. The ceiling was so high it felt like it was reaching up into the sky, and while there were no decorations to speak of, there were patterns on the walls that shined faintly. It was clear that this place was different from everywhere else they'd seen in the castle so far.

Aira hurried after the rest of the group and spoke with awe and enmity:

“Th-This is Emperor Gelmed's throne room.”

But atop the platform wasn't a seat any man could occupy. In fact, what was there wasn't even remotely human. It was a gigantic tree that stood where the throne should be, lording over them like a tower extending to the heavens. The surface of its trunk was rough and gnarled, and the tree's branches extended up to the ceiling, but there were no leaves growing anywhere, almost like it was frozen in a perpetual winter.

And set in the rough, rock-like surface was the shape of a human face, moving and contorting like muddled clay. The ugly, wrinkled face of the Emperor surfaced, directing an evil glare at them.

“Who treads here? Seeking an audience with me...”



His voice echoed heavily through the vast space. It seemed like the sound was emanating from multiple places at once. The face on the tree trunk likely wasn't his actual form, and destroying it would probably just make more surface from different spots.

Noah gritted her teeth, enraged by the Emperor's words.

—Who are we...? He asks us that now?!

"Cease this foolishness, Emperor Gelmed... You fear us. You wouldn't have sent so many pieces of your body after us if you didn't."

But the Emperor's voice betrayed no signs of confusion nor bluffing. There was no emotion to his voice at all.

"...My body...? Ah, you mean earlier... I felt something touch upon an appendage of mine. So it was you."

"You scum! You call that battle with us...a touch?!"

The tree seemed to inhale deeply.

"Again. It is all the same. Another repetition. Without so much as a glance from me, you come before me, speak of battle, and die of your own accord."

He finally expressed some kind of emotion — exasperation. Weariness.

"You weren't even...aware we were here?"

"You did not...bring the Girl of the Vessel, did you...? Then whoever you are... I have no need of you..."

And as if to finish the conversation one-sidedly, without so much as waiting for Noah's response, the Emperor's old, wrinkled face disappeared. The tree trunk returned to being nothing more than an unrefined pillar. His presence was gone.

And then they heard tentacles creeping in from every direction. The Emperor didn't display any enmity or haughtiness. He didn't order them to remove or eliminate the intruders. He treated them with complete and utter apathy, as if to say they would die on their own either way.

Emperor Gelmed remained entirely indifferent to anything that wasn't the

Girl of the Vessel. No intruder could harm him, so he didn't even regard them as anything he had to deal with.

Emperor Gelmed was transcendent. He wasn't simply strong — he was on a wholly different order of magnitude, and unremarkable beings like the Palace Knights couldn't even so much as interact with him. To him, they were like insects. Blades of grass. Pebbles on the roadside. He could trample them underfoot and not so much as notice.

Noah was speechless. The difference in strength was more than she'd ever imagined, and it left her at a complete loss for words. They had lost precious comrades to someone who didn't so much as acknowledge them as his opponents, something that had lashed at them in a way that didn't even occur to it as a proper attack.

Noah had seen countless absurdities since coming to this world, but this one beat them all.

The first to step forward was Alan. His reckless charge left him grievously wounded, but Maximum healed him in time. His bones, internal organs, and crushed eye were all back to normal.

"Yeah, I get it... If we're less than gnats to you... I guess we'll just need to punch your face in and make you realize who you're supposed to fear here!"

"Alan?!" Noah looked at him, shocked.

"Noah, cast all the spells you can at him!" he said, holding his sword aloft.

He was about to unleash a powerful skill, which made Noah regain her fighting spirit. It wasn't her first time facing people who'd looked down on her, and they had all lived to regret it.

"That's right... I'll use you guys to defeat the Emperor! Show him hell! 《Apocalypse Abyss》!"

A magic circle formed around the great tree. Before *Cross Reverie* had had its balance changed, this was a difficult spell to cast, but by the time Noah played it, it didn't take much windup time. It was a highly potent spell that used each of the four elements. Within the magic circle, the ground cracked, whirlwinds brewed, frost billowed, and magma erupted forth.

“Go to hell, Emperor Gelmed!”

†

Maximum thrust his broadsword into the ground.

“《Death Curse》!”

He had multiple titles, but his original class was dark knight. His healing wasn’t at all like the miracles the clergymen employed — all he was doing was transferring life force to others. Each time he healed someone, a summon stone in his inventory shattered.

The Death Curse, however, was a spell unique to the dark knight class. It was a malediction that inflicted a status ailment on the opponent that prevented them from healing. It had a limited-time effect, but it couldn’t be resisted.

The dark knight class was a debuffer. Its build included a number of spells that were exceedingly effective when fighting powerful single targets, such as spells that reduced speed or prevented the use of spells and physical skills.

Noah’s magic peeled away the rock-like bark of the great tree. The tentacles around them crumbled to dust along with all that was being stripped from the tree, incapable of recovering thanks to the Death Curse’s effects. Their efforts were proving effective.

Having finished charging up his attack, Alan swung down his longsword.

“《Solar Blade》!”

The light element slash tore through the massive tree. Cracks ran through the tower-like trunk, and it too began crumbling away. However, although it looked like it was over, massive amounts of magical energy spilled out of the remains of the tree.

Noah heard a hoarse voice echo in her mind.

“...It is too soon to crack the egg’s shell open... If I am not allowed to incubate within the Girl of the Vessel, I shall overflow throughout this world...”

There was a hollow inside the crumbling tree, with...*something* sitting inside it: a pure-white Magimatic Sol. It seemed to be the source of the massive magical energy being emitted, which produced a physical pressure that

threatened to blow them away. It was like standing in the middle of a typhoon.

Aira, who stood next to Noah, opened her eyes in shock.

“I-Is that...?!”

“You know what that is?!” Noah asked her.

“The original Magimatic construct...said to have been lost in an ancient war. It’s said to be the source of all Magimatic technology. The otherworld gatekeeper... The Ivory Magimatic Garment, Cross Reverie! The cornerstone of the Gelmed Empire, and the holy garb of God!”

“Cross Reverie?!” Noah repeated the words, stunned.

“Yes, Cross Reverie...” Aira nodded. “Lady Noah, you’ve heard of it...?”

The MMORPG *Cross Reverie* never explained the reason behind its name. But in this other world, it was the name of some armor used by God? Was it related to the game somehow? Noah shook her head. She didn’t have time to ponder that now.

“What it’s called doesn’t matter! Tell us how to destroy that thing! Does it have a weakness?!”

“I...I didn’t even know the Magimatic Garment existed until now...”

“Ugh, you’re useless!” Noah clicked her tongue in frustration.

Aira took a step back, hanging her head.

—*Gods and Demon Lords don’t just show themselves to people, dammit!*
Noah muttered to herself bitterly. *This is absurd! This is why I hate fantasy game worlds!*

Apocalypse Abyss had a limitation on how many times it could be used. The next time she’d be able to cast it would be tomorrow. She’d have to use something else.

Noah raised her left hand, deciding on another spell.

“Alan, get back! It doesn’t matter what armor the Emperor has on; this should send it to the void between worlds — 《Gravity Abyss》!”

Like Apocalypse Abyss, this was a spell that had a long windup time in older

versions of the game, but when Noah learned it, she was capable of firing it off without needing to wait. It was a powerful dark element spell that dealt massive damage to one target. She fired a dark arrow toward Cross Reverie.

—You just had to make a scene when you showed up, so don't you dare dodge it!

She'd heard Diablo used this spell to destroy a Magimatic Sol, so it should have been effective. After all, the Magimatic Sols were likely based on the Magimatic Garment and operated similarly to it. Just like them, it was three times the size of a person and covered in armor plates. The biggest difference was that the Magimatic Garment had three sets of white, swan-like wings on its back.

—What if those wings block the spell? Would Gravity Abyss just consume one of them and send it to the void?

That would be bad. Even a level 300 sorcerer didn't have limitless MP.

But Noah's concern proved to be unfounded. The Magimatic Garment remained still, and the spell hit it directly in the torso — where the Magimatic Sols' cockpit hatches were.

Noah didn't know what was inside Cross Reverie's cockpit. Was it the old Emperor, or maybe just his soul? Maybe just some puppet made of his tentacles? Was the Emperor somewhere else, manipulating everything from afar?

She didn't know. But either way, the Gravity Abyss spell triggered and began sucking everything around it inside. There was no stopping it anymore.

"You did it!" Alan pumped his fist.

"Oooh..." Maximum uttered in amazement.

†

A hole to the void formed on the Magimatic Garment Cross Reverie's chestpiece, pulling against everything in the room, including the air itself. The armor twisted and distorted as it was drawn into the hole. Aira felt herself being sucked toward the hole as well.

“Aaah?! Kuh..!”

“We’ve got you!” Maximum reached out his thick arm and braced his feet to catch her just as she was beginning to lurch forward.

“Th-Thank you!”

“Miss Aira, I’ve heard you slew Lieutenant General Kudanis in the citadel city of Kenstone...?”

When the Gelmed Empire first invaded Lyferia, she defeated a general guarding the border. He was a skilled high-level warrior.

“...I had my subordinates, Rikka and Erina, to help me back then. And more importantly, I was using a Magimatic Sol.”

She wouldn’t have beaten him in a one-on-one sword duel. If she weren’t compatible with 《Arjanos of the Silver》, she never would have been placed in charge of an army, let alone participated in the attack on Lyferia. Of course, if she weren’t compatible, the Magimatic Sol’s tentacles would have devoured her...

“I’m sure you had your reasons, but we can discuss it when we all return alive. And we have to give it everything we’ve got if we’re going to survive. I’m sorry, but I won’t always have the time to protect you.”

“I-I came here to help you so I can take revenge on the one who destroyed my homeland. I’d sacrifice my life if it means defeating Emperor Gelmed!”

“That’s the spirit!” Maximum said, then raised his broadsword and cast a spell.

Aira also drew her blade and moved slightly away from Noah and the rest. Maximum prioritized protecting Noah, but he was a kind man. He might have said he wouldn’t focus on defending Aira, but she knew he wouldn’t abandon her if she were to be attacked. So she took her distance so as to not be a burden to him.

Without Arjanos of the Silver, Aira was just a Kobold warrior who didn’t even reach level 100. But she should have been able to at least stall the enemy’s attacks. She glared at Emperor Gelmed — at the Magimatic Garment Cross

Reverie. Half of it was already collapsing into the hole in space Noah's spell created, breaking apart like it was being crushed by a vise. Its head began to crack.

"Wow..."

She'd heard the Demon, Diablo, used the same spell, Gravity Abyss, to destroy Rikka's 《Viatonos of the White》. And it was working on the Magimatic Garment too.

Are we beating it?! Aira thought to herself, holding her breath in anticipation. She had always been too afraid to oppose the Emperor, but not for a second did she forget the deaths of her family and friends in her homeland, nor did she forget the hardships experienced by the survivors. The days of humiliating slavery she was forced to live through flashed in her mind.

"Aaaah, Emperor Gelmed!" Aira shouted, swinging up her blade and holding it aloft. "Know the pain...of those you've trampled!"

Aira unleashed a martial art. Compared to the attacks of the Palace Knights and the Magimatic Sols, its power was meager, but a flash of light intersected and combined with her attack — Alan's martial art.

"Aaaaaah, get smaaaaashed!" he shouted.

The shining art pushed its way forward, causing the ground beneath it to tremble. It made a direct hit on the partially wrecked Cross Reverie, destroying the remaining half.

Aira swallowed in fear. She'd always waited for this — the moment when Emperor Gelmed would fall.

An explosion enveloped the Magimatic Garment. The air drawn in by the spell was expelled outward with a shock wave that sent Aira tumbling to the floor.

"Ugh!"

The pressure felt like it would crush her altogether, accompanied by a sharp pain in her ears. Once it passed, she heard what sounded like the din of rain. Did the blast ruin her hearing? No, it was still a little hard to hear, but her ears weren't completely damaged. She heard what sounded like metal clanging

against the ground. Aira looked up at the ceiling.

“What’s that?!” she exclaimed in shock.

“Hm?!” Alan looked up as well. It looked like the building was warping, and the distortion was getting bigger and bigger. A hole formed in midair, revealing a vast darkness behind it. Lights sparkled inside, like the twinkling of the stars.

“Is that...” Noah said, her voice strained. “Is that a hole to another world?!”

It was the same phenomenon as the Gravity Abyss, except much larger. As the air pressure in the room rapidly changed, a whirlwind blew Aira away, knocking her into a wall. As gravity pulled her down, she found she was near a large hole in the floor — some kind of drainage pipe. Realizing she was about to fall in, she hurriedly grabbed onto the ledge.

“Ugh...”

As the space above them contorted, the white mechanical unit appeared from within the void — from the gate it had opened.

—*Emperor Gelmed came back?!*

There wasn’t a single scratch on Cross Reverie. It flapped its wings elegantly, like some kind of white bird soaring through the heavens. The enemy supposedly expelled from this world by the Gravity Abyss spell appeared before them again with ease.

Emperor Gelmed spoke, every syllable shaking the room.

“Blind, foolish weaklings who crawl and writhe underfoot! I am the Emperor of the Gelmed Empire! Ruler of all that exists, a living god! Kneel before me!”

Before Aira realized it, tentacles appeared all over the room. The Apocalypse Abyss and Alan’s martial art should have destroyed the tree’s trunk, but the effect of the dark knight’s Death Curse had worn off, allowing the enemy to regenerate again.

More and more tendrils appeared. As Aira attempted to climb out of the drainage tunnel, a tentacle swiped over her head, forcing her to duck reflexively. At that moment, her hands slipped from the ledge. Even with her sharp Kobold claws, she wouldn’t be able to climb out of the tunnel when she

was wet.

“Aaaaaaaaaaah!”

She plummeted down into the dark.

†

Noah didn't falter. Emperor Gelmed was dangerous enough of a monster to make even the Demon Lord Krebskulm join forces with them against him. His return didn't come as much of a surprise. In fact, she'd seen so many surprises today she'd become completely desensitized.

“Tch... You come back even after I throw you into another dimension?!” Noah shouted. “Fine, then I'll destroy you in this world!”

She thrust the staff in her hand forward.

“Let countless explosions reduce you to ash! Infinity Detonation!”

It was a spell the Demon Lord Krebskulm used — a level 260 fire element spell. Flashes of light enveloped the enemy, and a rumbling sound thundered in their ears. It felt like the explosion was powerful enough to reduce anything to ashes. But when the smoke cleared, Cross Reverie stood undisturbed with its arm raised.

“I see... You've reached the zenith of what the mortal races are capable of. Very well, I shall handle you myself. Feel the searing blaze of God upon your flesh!”

Noah felt a shiver run down her spine. Emperor Gelmed was finally attacking with the intention of defeating them. She could feel bloodlust prickling against her skin.

“Ugh...” a whimper escaped her lips.

“I'm not letting yooou!” Alan charged forward. He wasn't one to just sit back and give the enemy time to attack. He unleashed a slashing martial art while Maximum chanted a curse.

“Slow Lock!”

This spell had the effect of slowing down the enemy's actions. The spell and

the martial arts' effects intersected, and cracks formed in the floor and walls around them. Unlike Emperor Gelmed and his armor, their side didn't have some legendary defense. Even though they collected the best gear they could possibly find in the Kingdom of Lyferia...

—*We have to keep going!*

"We'll just keep attacking until you're destroyed! 《Millions Rusher》!" This time, Noah chanted a powerful air element spell. Alan also continued unleashing martial arts.

"Ooooooh! Goooooo!"

Noah unleashed a second spell, then a third. All of them were spells approaching level 300, powerful magic she'd never had a chance to use before. She was now very nearly bottomed out on her MP reserves, which left her dizzy and her mind muddled.

"Haa... Haa... Haa..."

The smoke cleared, revealing a pair of pearly white wings flapping open elegantly. Cross Reverie was still unharmed.

"Have you realized the futility of your efforts?" Emperor Gelmed asked.

"I never quiiiit!" Alan charged forward, his sword in hand.

"Fool." The Magimatic Garment brandished an arm. The next moment, an invisible slash cut into Alan's flesh.

"Aaaaaaaaagh?!"

"Alan!" Maximum called out. Normally, he'd rush over to help him, but this time he remained still. He didn't know what the enemy's attack range was, he still needed to defend Noah, and to top it all off... It was questionable if there was any point to healing Alan at this point. He'd been thoroughly cut up, and he sank to the floor, where he lay completely still.

"...Alan?" Noah whispered his name.

No response. She began breathing heavily, for reasons completely unrelated to fatigue. The strongest of the Palace Knights was downed with a single strike. They had no more buffs... No time to heal... Wild abandon could only carry

them so far. They'd used all of their most powerful attacks to no effect.

—*We're...powerless.*

Emperor Gelmed's tentacles crept closer. Several of them swarmed over Alan's body, blocking it from sight. Noah turned around, only to find that Aira wasn't there. Maybe she ran, or perhaps the tentacles devoured her.

Something hot built up in the corners of Noah's eyes, and tears streamed down her cheeks unrestrained. She was afraid. She had failed, majorly, in a way she'd never be able to recover from. Her strategy was completely wrong, and she'd picked a fight with the wrong enemy.

And now she'd die. She was next.

†

Maximum stepped up in front of Noah.

"Use the magical tool to escape," he told her.

"Huh?"

"I'll attack and create a chance. Use it to escape."

—*I can't leave my allies behind and run! If that's my only option, I'd rather die in an honorable defeat!*

...But of course, she was in no situation to cling to that kind of honor.

"Ri...Right... Understood."

Noah shamefully clung to her one chance at survival. She was afraid. Afraid of death now approaching her... Of her own mortality... Of losing the life she had now... And Maximum remained loyal to her until the very end.

"Please stay safe, Lady Noah!"

"I'm sorry... I'm sorry... I'm so sorry..."

Just how pathetic and despicable of a person was she? Noah's thoughts were in a state of complete chaos. Maximum filled his broadsword with magical energy.

"Emperor Gelmed, I put my life into this fatal blow. Take it if you can!" he

bellowed.

“Your life? How foolish,” Emperor Gelmed replied. “The lives of the mortal races amount to little... You’re nothing more than fuel to operate a Magimatic Sol for a moment, at best.”

“Then try it! Nnnnnnnnnng! Dark Meteor Sword!”

Maximum’s broadsword lit up with black flames. He leapt up, holding the blade over his head, and swung it down on the Magimatic Garment. Cross Reverie remained still. But just as the slash was about to land, an invisible barrier blocked Maximum’s blade. The attack dug into the barrier, creating sparks.

“Take thiiiiis!”

A loud cracking sound could be heard. It was awfully clear despite the loudness of the place. Cracks formed in the translucent wall, and Maximum’s blade finally forced its way through, connecting with Cross Reverie’s head.

“Aaaaaaaaah!” Maximum roared.

“Oh?” Emperor Gelmed exclaimed, surprised that the sword had actually made contact with him. The tone of his voice changed.

“...It is a pity,” he whispered, looking at Maximum. “I would have liked to have seen if you were compatible with a Magimatic Sol...”

Gelmed sighed.

“But you’ve already expired.”

Maximum stood motionless, his body still fixed in the position he was in when he swung down the sword, no longer breathing. Noah froze up, an item in her hand. She wasn’t just sitting back and watching this play out; she was trying to use the magical tools she’d prepared for an emergency, but they all proved useless and refused to activate just when she needed them most.

Noah began to hyperventilate. It felt like the air was thinner than it should have been. Cross Reverie turned to face her.

“None are allowed to cross my barrier... You may neither enter nor leave.”

He'd set up some kind of barrier to prevent intruders, which also stopped her from teleporting away. And the Cloth Gate she'd used to infiltrate the Magimatic Castle Viovix could only be used to cross into places she could see. No matter where she tried to move in this closed space, it wouldn't mean much.

"I-I'm... I'm a sorcerer of the highest possible level in Cross Reverie..." Noah stammered.

Cross Reverie said nothing.

"I could beat any raid boss by myself..."

Again, silence.

"Kuh... Wh-Who are you?!" Noah shouted, her nerves finally giving way.

"Hm... I see... Those abilities, that knowledge... You're an outsider..." Cross Reverie eventually said.

Someone who was either reincarnated or summoned into this world — an outsider. That's also what the few scholars she had investigating the matter called it. Did Emperor Gelmed know about her old world too? The sheer power he wielded made Noah believe he likely knew anything and everything.

"...There shouldn't be any enemy in this world my magic doesn't work on," Noah said, her voice shivering. "Be it an emperor or a Demon Lord, I should be able to fight you. Wh-Who are you...? Did you come from another world...?"

"I did not come this far through unearned talent or mindless ploys," Emperor Gelmed said maliciously. "Through discipline and effort did I become a transcendent who would eradicate God... Do not waste my time."

The wind roared in Noah's ears. Her fingertips began to freeze. Everything suddenly turned cold, her face aching from the drop in temperature, but she was quickly losing sensation. Her body stiffened as the wind continued to howl.

†

Suddenly, Noah's field of vision was turned upside down and the ground under her gave way.

"What...?!"

An animalistic cry pierced her ears. A large, tubular monster burst out from the hole that had just opened beneath her, its fanged mouth wide open.

—Another tentacle?

But just as Noah was about to unleash another spell, she realized that wasn't the case.

—It's a 《Trap Worm》!

A summon beast. An armored figure appeared in the giant, gaping mouth of the worm, reaching his arm out to her.

"Snap out of it, you ugly woman!" he chided her.

"You?!"

The former paladin Gewalt. He grabbed Noah by the collar and yanked her into the Trap Worm, which burrowed back down into the floor immediately.

"Agh?!"

"Don't let go of me!" Gewalt shouted. "And don't throw up either! No amount of washing would get your vomit off my clothes!"

"You come here now, after all this time...?!"

Gewalt gazed at Noah's face with a dubious expression.

"You really are loved, aren't you?" he said. "These were the orders Captain Maximum gave me. To get you out of here and run if all else fails."

"M-Max told you to...?!"

"Let me tell you, my heart skipped a beat when he said that. I can't just turn down a good man's request."

Noah bit her lips bitterly. She never realized how important those beside her really were until it was too late, after she'd lost them. The tears ran again with nothing to hold them back anymore.

—I lost someone so important.

"It's too soon to let down your guard though," Gewalt commented, his lips curling up into a smirk. As soon as he said that, Noah's field of vision turned

over again. Something had struck them, and hard. The summon beast was torn apart behind them.

“Whoa?!”

It was slimy and sticky and not at all a pleasant ride, but the beast still carried them away from danger...and now it had been split in two, crumbling in a puff of light. The summon crystal popped back into Gewalt's hand.

“Tch! That old man won't let us go, will he? What's killing an ugly girl like you compared to governing all of existence?! Or is my beauty drawing him to me?!”

“I'll knock your teeth out, you dick!”

Noah was thrown out into the open air. But even as she shouted at Gewalt, she looked around cautiously. She was probably at a lower level than the room where she fought Cross Reverie, since the summon beast was destroyed while still within the castle.

Held in Gewalt's arms, Noah continued plummeting down. A fall from this height would kill a normal person, but her level 300 body was more durable. This wouldn't cause her that much fall damage.

But the ground they were falling toward was black.

—*What?!*

She only realized it just before impact. They hit the black surface with a large, loud splash.

“Bwfah?!”

It was water. Indeed, it was a gigantic castle capable of moving, but despite that, there was no water storage facility on Viovix's surface. Even if the castle was mostly populated by machines and tentacle monsters, it still needed a reliable source of water. The pool was relatively shallow, so that their legs reached the bottom.

“Let go of me,” Noah said, shaking off Gewalt's arms and pulling away from him.

“Believe me, I don't want to lay hands on a woman either! I don't want your smell on me!”

“Kuh... Is this the castle’s water tank?”

“If it is, I guess it’s their drinking water.”

“Based on what Aira told me... Most of the defense here is handled by the Magi Guards, but there are also engineers and laborers here.”

—But if that was true, why haven’t we seen anyone since we got here?

“Ugh... The thought of drinking this makes me sick!” Gewalt said, grimacing.

“Really?” Noah asked. The water didn’t seem any different from well water, hygienically speaking...

“Look at this tree!” he said.

“Tree?”

“Isn’t the bark familiar? Its color is a little different though.”

Noah finally noticed that there was a massive tree growing in the water. And indeed, its size and rugged bark did remind her of something else.

“No... This is Emperor Gelmed’s tree?!”

“I don’t want to think there might be more than one of that monster. It must be the tree’s roots!”

This tree was Emperor Gelmed himself, and the source of those tentacles. Seeing its roots were submerged in the water, Noah suddenly didn’t want to have to drink this water either.

†

The water’s surface was undulating. The walls creaked as the roots began vibrating.

“The cooldowns on my summon beasts aren’t over yet...” Gewalt clicked his tongue in frustration.

“It’s coming after us!” Noah called out.

Countless tentacles splashed down into the water, approaching them rapidly. This time, there were no allies left to cut them off before they could reach her.

“Grr...” Gewalt gritted his teeth. “You were throwing spells left and right

earlier, weren't you?! What gives?!"

"I hardly have any MP left... I can't cast any spells capable of sweeping them away..." Noah muttered helplessly.

"Don't you have any magical tools?!"

"Yes, but only for producing clothes and food."

"We're not here for a picnic, are we, you idiot?!"

Noah did elaborately prepare for this attack with a number of contingency plans. She had tools that acted as lanterns, sound bombs, tools to repair broken weapons and armor, and so on...but none of them were useful here. Everything that happened was simply too unexpected.

And then it appeared, accompanied by the tentacles.

The Magimatic Garment Cross Reverie. Emperor Gelmed.

"I shall praise you..." his hoarse voice boomed around them. "You've managed to escape my watchful gaze a single time. Impressive..."

Gewalt drew the sword sheathed at his waist.

"Tch... I doubt 《Ifrit》 would even buy us time..." he muttered bitterly.

Cross Reverie's chestpiece swung open. It was packed with tentacles inside which parted and revealed the wrinkled head of an old man.

"Are you the master of that summon beast from earlier?" the old man asked.

"And what if I am?" Gewalt replied suspiciously.

"Then I would like to try it on you, in place of my missing subordinates."

"Try what?"

A few slender tendrils slithered under the water, grabbing Gewalt by the ankles. Before he could even react, they coiled around his limbs, and sooner than he could scream, a tentacle plunged into his mouth.

"Nnnngah?!"

Emperor Gelmed's expression contorted into an eerie smile. His eyes narrowed so much they were indistinguishable from the wrinkles on his face.

“Should you survive, it will give you power. And should you not be suitable...it shall feast upon your organs. Serve me well.”

“Nnnngaah?! Ugh?! Bwaaah?!” Gewalt croaked and thrashed.

Noah was frozen on the spot. She felt that she ought to save him...but one wrong move would get her killed. No magic worked on the Magimatic Garment, and it attacked faster than the mightiest of warriors. The sheer terror she felt in that moment made it difficult to breathe.

Her past life, a time when nothing went the way she wanted it, flashed in her mind. Beads of sweat formed on her forehead and rolled down her cheeks.

“Ugh...”

She couldn’t even resist. There would be no running away or fighting back. Emperor Gelmed glared at her.

“Let us try it on you next,” he said.

If there was any way of surviving this situation, it was being compatible with a Magimatic Sol and serving as the Emperor’s disposable pawn. Noah’s field of vision contorted.

“Heh... Heheh...” she chuckled, extending her hand forward. “I have to spend my second life...bowing down to shitty old men like you all over again?! Never!”

She would never again live her life licking the boots of a superior she hated. And with this, she triggered a spell, omitting the incantation.

—《*Shining Lance*》!

The Magimatic Garment’s chestpiece was still open, so she aimed her light spear at the wrinkled face inside it. It went flying, streaking through the air in a straight line.

“Get him!”

“You fool...”

But once again, an invisible barrier blocked Noah’s spell.

“Divine retribution shall befall whomever tries to harm me... And you’ve acted foolishly enough to earn such a fate. Let judgment be passed!”

A massive amount of mana gathered and launched a type of attack that was unlike anything Noah had ever seen. Freezing air was now washing over her. Noah screamed, her field of vision blurry with tears. But just as her tears froze to her face...

A hand was thrust forward from behind Noah, and it wasn't a hand that belonged to any of the races. Covered in armor, it was oddly similar to Cross Reverie in that there were no seams in the metal. The cold air suddenly dispersed.

—Did Emperor Gelmed stop...?

No, that wasn't it. Noah realized the owner of this armored hand stopped the attack and reasoned that it must have been a sorcerer who far exceeded her.

—Who is this?!

She turned around and screeched in fear again.

Before her was a monster.

Its body was clad in purple armor, and five crimson eyes gleamed on its angular head. Horns extended from its head and shoulders, and in place of its mouth was a long crease that extended all the way to its ears.

"Is that the Emperor?" the monster asked, speaking with Diablo's voice.

Chapter 3: Fighting the Emperor

Diablo thrust out his right hand. He tried to mitigate Gelmed's attack with a 《Cyclone Jet》 spell, but it failed to completely disperse the cold air.

"Is that the Emperor?" he asked Noah, who turned to face him.

"A-Are you...?" she stuttered, her face pale and her voice shaking.

Diablo raised a hand to touch his face.

—Yeah, I figured I'd look something like this...

He recalled how Aira assumed he was an enemy when he picked her up from the drainage pipe. There weren't any mirrors around, so he couldn't check, but apparently he now looked completely different. From what he could gather from looking down at his body, he'd taken on an appearance similar to the purple, armored form of Demon Lord Krebskulm. When Klem gave him her "Demon Lord's true power," he'd transformed into this.

—I guess I should be grateful I didn't turn into a skeleton or a slime...

Diablo unleashed another spell from his thrust-out hand. And again, he left out the incantation. 《Aero Shredder》 — blades of condensed air severed the tentacles coiled around Gewalt.

"Bwaaah?!" Gewalt spat out pieces of the severed tentacle that had penetrated his mouth.

He fell with a splash into the water and then cowered away. Apparently, he was terrified of being in the same water as Diablo, but said nothing more.

"So you survived. You're one tenacious bastard."

Even as he sat with water up to his chest, his own vomit spreading before him, Gewalt glared at him reproachfully.



“Ugh, that voice...” he groaned. “You’re Diablo?”

He would realize after this much. Gewalt had met him more times than Noah or Aira.

“Where are the others?” Diablo asked.

“They’re dead,” Gewalt spat out bitterly.

Diablo felt his breath catch in his throat. He didn’t know them that well, and he’d only just started remembering their names... But they were still part of the same party for a time. His heart throbbed painfully as the weight set in.

“...I see,” he eventually managed to say.

“You come here now, you good-for-nothing?!” Noah bellowed at him angrily. “What did you even come with us for?!”

Diablo couldn’t refute what she was saying. Klem may have given him a Demon Lord’s power, but he was still too emotionally bruised from the loss of her. He’d only just worked up enough motivation to get moving. Hearing Aira’s scream as she fell into the water duct snapped him out of his sorrow... But while Noah and her group were fighting for their lives, Diablo was curled up on the floor.

As a party member, he needed to at least apologize to them — Diablo knew that much. But the words wouldn’t come. Conversing with people normally was too difficult for him, especially when he was being blamed for something and shouted at.

If he tried to apologize now, he would just look away and stutter. Diablo couldn’t talk without acting like he was in the game, after all. Just like how an ape couldn’t fly, weeds couldn’t walk, and bugs couldn’t write. It was impossible.

And so, Diablo spoke grandly.

“I am Diablo, a Demon Lord from another world! Anyone who turns their blade against me will be wiped from existence!”

Noah stiffened in place, her eyes wide. Maybe those words, coupled with how he looked now, overwhelmed her. Or maybe she was simply disgusted beyond

words, since she knew who he really was.

—I won't know what you're thinking unless you say it.

"A man of the mortal races may say what he wants..." Emperor Gelmed remarked. "You are all equally powerless before me."

"Hmph. It seems you've grown senile, old man," Diablo retorted, not allowing his composure to crack. "I just told you, I am no mere mortal."

The Emperor had absolute confidence in his powers. Diablo, by contrast, could only pretend. He was, in fact, terrified. He broke into a cold sweat as his heart beat faster.

—If this were in the game, I'd be flaming the forums like crazy about it being a broken event! No walkthroughs, no redos, the location's hard to reach, it's all decided by one fight, and if you lose, you die!

While Diablo spoke with a Demon Lord's haughty dignity, his gamer mind was working at full throttle. Noah could fire powerful spells in quick succession, so the fact that the Emperor was able to block them all implied that he had some ability to nullify magic. Either that or rapid HP recovery.

"...That's what Emperor Gelmed looks like now," Noah said to his back. "It's called 'the Magimatic Garment Cross Reverie.'"

"What?!" Diablo replied, shocked.

"I don't know how it's related to the game..."

The MMORPG *Cross Reverie*. The game Diablo and Noah had played. The very same one that his character, Diablo, whom he was summoned into the body of, was from. It wasn't clear how the MMORPG and this world were related, and based on what Noah told him, this world didn't even seem to conform to the same flow of time as their old one.

But just then, Diablo heard a sound in his head. It was some kind of alert, perhaps part of the Demon Lord's power. Emperor Gelmed — the Magimatic Garment Cross Reverie — floated up into the air. Diablo braced himself for battle. He was in front of a powerful raid boss and didn't have the time to bother with its name or lore right now.

“There’s a barrier around Cross Reverie,” Noah added. “Swords and magic don’t work on it.”

“Hmph. Same as me, then,” Diablo said.

“What?”

His 《Shining Wing Armor》 had a barrier too. On top of its thankfully-high defense, ordinary magic and attacks were ineffective against it.

—How do I hit this thing, though?

He wasn’t going to beat this opponent by staring it down. For a moment, Diablo considered his usual strategies. For example, waiting for the opponent to lift its barrier, or alternatively, striking it with high firepower attacks repeatedly until their defenses broke. But just then, an idea *he wasn’t aware of* surfaced in his mind: a technique he had never used before.

—A spell that can penetrate barriers?

He wasn’t sure if he could actually cast a bona fide Demon Lord spell. That doubt weighed on his mind for a moment.

—Can I really do it?! Just use it without ever trying it before, just firing it off against a raid boss in the moment of truth?! What’s this thing’s cast time? Its cooldown time? Its MP cost? Can I dodge while chanting it? Can it even break through Gelmed’s barrier anyway?!

Although he was panicking under the surface, Diablo’s attitude remained uncompromisingly smug.

“My magic will destroy you!”

“What?!” Noah stared at him. “You think you can beat him?!”

“Out of my way, girl! Get away if you value your life!”

—This spell might be dangerous. Please move away!

Diablo pushed Noah back behind him. Emperor Gelmed stole the power of God — meaning Diablo would have to use the full power of the Demon Lord Krebskulm. If Noah were to be caught up in his attack, she wouldn’t walk away unscathed, even if she was a level 300 sorcerer. Gewalt wasn’t anywhere in

sight, of course. Thanks to his crafty intuition, he knew to make himself scarce.

Diablo thrust both arms forward. He wouldn't use Tenma's Staff — no, he used this body as his weapon, since it was close to his image of Klem and what she would have done.

—*Bubbles.*

Several bubbles, each of them a world of their own... That image formed keenly in his mind. As one bubble pressed against and then penetrated another... This was it — a blade that could pierce worlds.

“《Dimension Blast》!”

Flashes of light burst out of his extended palms. They reached the barrier around Cross Reverie and blew it away.

“Ugh?!” Emperor Gelmed screamed for the first time. “Ah?! Aaaaaaaaagh!”

All the tentacles around them were blown away along with the barrier. The water below them parted, and the previously submerged tree roots were crushed and carved out. The wall behind Cross Reverie crumbled, as did the surrounding walls and the floor under the roots.

—*Wait, this is bad!*

He did expect the attack to pierce the barrier, but it ended up destroying everything around them as collateral damage. Falling rubble blocked his field of vision.

—*What happened to Emperor Gelmed?!*

Diablo didn't dare assume he had defeated him. Even if he did, he'd still need to finish him off. Diablo wouldn't let such superfluous thoughts cloud his judgment. He was prepared for the worst, no matter what.

All the water that had been in the pool around them made an audible bubbling sound as it drained away.

“The floor's collapsing!” Noah called out nervously.

†

Noah screamed as she fell. The massive roots still spread out across the floor

now crumbled as the floor fell apart beneath them. Diablo assumed Noah could use flight magic at her level...but her eyes clung to him, wordlessly asking for help as her hands grasped desperately at thin air.

—*Are you telling me a level 300 sorcerer can't use flight magic?!*

Diablo clicked his tongue bitterly and paused his offensive. The mental image of the next spell he was going to cast faded away. He spent MP on flight magic instead, an ominous magic circle forming around him.

Heat coursed through his back as four large, sinister, glowing wings of light manifested behind him. They resembled an insect's wings, but were firm, with sections that were transparent. Kicking against the air, he took off after Noah. Compared to the speed of flight that his Empty Sky's Gambol was capable of, he was now substantially faster. He felt like a fluttering bee in flight.

When Diablo fought the Demon Lord Krebskulm, she had never moved like this, so his ideas for this power must have differed from what Klem's had been. He knocked away the rubble in his path and pulled Noah's falling body into his grip.

"Aaah?!"

She held onto him for dear life. He pulled her closer, trying not to think about what he was doing too much. Being bashful about it now would be pointless. If he didn't save her, he'd effectively be abandoning her to die. The situation was critical, so he only acted reflexively.

"Can't you use flight magic?!" Diablo shouted at her.

"I-I can! I-I think I could... But I'm not...good at it..."

Diablo remembered something Noah told him once.

I tried to see if I could cast level 300 spells, but I've avoided combat, so I've never really tried to use offensive magic. You do know that dying in this world means you actually die, right? Why would I put myself in that kind of danger?

Diablo could agree with her logic. He became an adventurer without really knowing what this world was like, but if Rem and Shera, his summoners, were instead something like merchants or politicians, his life could have been very

different.

Even so, Diablo spoke overbearingly.

“Fool! Having a grasp of your own abilities is the most basic thing you must do!”

“I did try! But now it won’t work...”

“That’s why I said you must grasp the extent of your abilities! You have to train until you can cast a spell at a moment’s notice! That is when you truly grasp your abilities!”

“L-Listen, I’m not a machine...!”

—Maybe, but high-ranking players in my time took doing that for granted.

During its closing years, the MMORPG lowered its difficulty, making itself easier for new players in a bid to draw in a bigger user base. Mastering the hotkeys and committing them to muscle memory in such a demanding manner simply wasn’t required of players at the time Noah played.

But they didn’t have the time to talk about this. Diablo heard another warning in his mind, like someone was alerting him to something.

“I know!” he hissed, as if to silence that alarm in his mind. Diablo maneuvered through the air evasively, twisting his body as he performed steep turns. The enemy was firing a barrage at him from above, and he still needed to avoid the falling rubble.

“Ngh!” Noah let out a suffocated cry in his arms.

She might have been a level 300 sorcerer, but she was still a human woman, and his wings were carrying them at high speeds. He was protected by his armor, but the strain of his movements was too great for her. With all the water and rubble raining down on them, visibility was poor, and at times like these, he needed to focus on either defense or dodging.

—We really burst all the way out of the castle...

Dimension Blast had carved all the way down through the bottom of Castle Viovix. The castle grounds were supported in the air by gigantic legs, and now Diablo was flying through the air between the ground and Viovix’s underside.

Behind him was the sight of Lyferia's capital, Seven Wall. Much of it was in ruins from the war.

Diablo could see the twelfth district from afar, with the Inner Sanctum floating above it. That was where Rem — the Girl of the Vessel the Emperor was so dead set on capturing — was hiding, in addition to Shera and Lumachina. He couldn't let Gelmed approach that place.

Diablo fired an attack to keep the Emperor distracted.

“《Nine Phalanx》!”

Seven magi-guns made of mana formed around him, firing a long barrage of magical projectiles. But then a spear of light burst through the barrage and came flying his way.

“Huh?!”

—*What is he thinking?!*

If that hit him, it would have dealt crippling damage, but it was only a single-target attack. Not only did it miss him, it wasn't even flying in a trajectory that *could* hit him. Why even launch an attack like that?

But something instinctively told him that this was bad news. He thought to move and create distance between the spear and himself, but Noah wouldn't have been able to withstand him moving at full speeds.

Being occupied with that worry stalled him.

The spear of light exploded, scattering bullets of light in all directions around him, each of them only the size of a speck.

—*So that's what he was trying to do?!*

Diablo tried to dodge, but the bullets moved at dizzying speeds.

—*I can't dodge these!*

At that moment, a voice rang out in his head.

“Barrier!”

It was the high-pitched voice of a child. Multiple magic circles expanded around Diablo, forming a spherical barrier that blocked off the projectiles. The

moment the specks made contact, they exploded, showing that each one of them was charged with a vast amount of magical energy. The shock waves reverberated even through the barrier, shaking his body hard.

“Ugh!”

“Aaaaaah!” Noah screamed in his arms.

†

Once again, a child’s voice echoed in his mind.

“That was close!”

He couldn’t mistake who it belonged to. Diablo felt his throat seize up.

“I had enough time to do this because you moved away. Did you know that attack would split up like that?”

“I’m not foolish enough to be caught by something like that...”

“Diablo?”

—You’re still alive?

Diablo couldn’t manage to ask that question; his eyes were hot with tears. This was another moment where he hated the fact that he couldn’t speak honestly.

“Hmph... As tenacious as one would expect a Demon Lord to be, aren’t you?”

“Of course I am!” Klem’s voice replied proudly in his mind.

“...Can you return to your true form?”

“It’s my first time trying anything like this, so I don’t know... But probably?”

Diablo was overcome with relief. Having Klem live in his head forever would simply be too sad... Not to mention difficult.

“That was one reckless stunt you pulled, fool.”

“Heheh... If we lost to the Emperor, it would all be over anyway! If that happened, whether I can return to my own form or not would be the least of my worries.”

“...Mm,” he affirmed.

“Are you all right?” Noah looked at him, puzzled.

It really was only Diablo that could hear Klem’s voice, it seemed.

“...You cannot hear that voice? You truly are inexperienced,” Diablo said vaguely.

“Wh-What voice?” Noah asked, confused.

But of course she couldn’t hear it. Even if he’d tried to explain this situation to her, there would be so much to tell that she’d struggle to make sense of any of it. Only one thing really mattered, anyway.

—If I don’t defeat Emperor Gelmed, everything will be for naught.

“Right now, you’re exhibiting this Demon Lord’s regular power,” Klem said.

“It’s like my mana won’t stop overflowing.”

“That’s normal, isn’t it?” Klem asked offhandedly. *“Comfort Mode, as it’s called. But if it were enough to beat him, this Demon Lord would have been able to stop him by myself.”*

“Right, right.”

“So you need to enter Fanatic Mode, where you get all excited and destroy your enemy in a rage.”

Diablo immediately felt something thump inside him. His body heated up, and all the blood began climbing into his head.

“N-Nng...”

“And the level above Fanatic Mode...is Demon Lord Mode!”

His spine tingled and his thinking turned awfully cold — just like when he was pissed.

—Calm down! You can’t win if you lose your cool!

He tried suppressing his nerves. This wasn’t an opponent he could beat by letting his emotions get the better of him.

“Can you use it?” Klem asked him. *“This Demon Lord gave you this power because I thought you would need it...”*

He had no experience fighting anything similar to this opponent, let alone any information about it. He couldn't even imagine what Emperor Gelmed was capable of, and he wasn't the slightest bit confident he could win this fight.

But a Demon Lord wouldn't lose heart!

"Don't be foolish! No matter what manner of power it is, I am the true Demon Lord! I will contain and master it!"

"Heheh..." he felt like Klem's voice was smiling somehow. *"Then I entrust it to you, Diablo. Stay strong! Otherwise this form will consume you... And you will become just like the Emperor: a being consumed by its power."*

If that were to happen, the world really would come to an end. Still, pretending to be a Demon Lord only to eventually descend upon the world as a real Demon Lord would be terrible.

"You can leave things in my hands, Klem!"

He spoke boldly while shaking like a baby fawn on the inside, terrified.

—I can't even speak with my own words, and you're telling me to "stay strong"?

"Graaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah!" Klem howled inside his mind.

It felt like a bolt of lightning had struck him directly.

"Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah!" Diablo screamed back.

His consciousness faded away.

†

"Diablo! It's Emperor Gelmed!" Noah's voice pulled him back from the darkness.

Cross Reverie was floating in front of them.

"Your presence, it's changed... Who are you...?" Emperor Gelmed asked.

It was hard for Diablo to hear what Gelmed was saying. It felt like there was a constant wind roaring in his ear.

"How many times will I have to say it?" Diablo replied with a voice so hoarse

he didn't recognize it as his own.

—It feels like someone's stirring up my brain with a spoon...

He couldn't gather his thoughts. Meanwhile, Cross Reverie retreated from him. The dark ground was sprawled out before them, littered with water, rubble, debris from the tree roots, and the burnt remnants of the tentacles. The early morning showers were now becoming a storm, and the increasing gales of wind were making visibility that much worse.

“Go after him, Diablo! A Demon Lord's eyes can always see where their opponent is!”

“That's convenient.”

Suddenly, it felt like there was nothing between him and Cross Reverie. Not only was his enemy easy to detect, he could even sense all forms of life above them. Tree roots were spreading out of the bottom of the Magimatic Castle VioviX, winding and wriggling like tentacles. Right next to him, however...

“Diablo, are you all right?!” Noah raised her voice at him. “We should retreat for now! We should reorganize our forces and challenge Emperor Gelmed lat—”

“Oh, you're still here?” Diablo interrupted, realizing she was there.

“What?! You've been holding me the whole time!”

His physical strength was so high at this point that her weight didn't even register for him. He honestly had completely forgotten she was there, and he did feel a bit guilty about it. A single human's weight was lighter than a feather for him right now.

—I don't know if I can say it's thanks to Noah, but...I'm calmer now.

Diablo exhaled heavily. Every part of his body cried out in excitement as a frightening amount of mana overflowed from him every second. He had no intention of fleeing. For the sake of both those who had died and those who were still alive, he'd defeat his opponent here.

And that meant he couldn't take Noah along. He wanted to tell her that — to ask her to try using flight magic and get out of here... But he didn't have time to explain. And besides, telling an ally to run wasn't very Demon Lord-ly.

And that's important.

If his role playing were half-assed, he wouldn't be able to talk, and that would get in the way of concentrating on the battle.

Ever since he entered the Magimatic Castle Viovix... No, ever since he decided to work under Noah... And perhaps even earlier, when he wound up in a position to fight and defend other people... Diablo hadn't been at his prime. And Emperor Gelmed was too powerful an opponent, so he couldn't fight him with his mind so lulled.

And so, Diablo repeated it to himself like a mantra.

—I am a Demon Lord. A Demon Lord!

—I am the Demon Lord. The one true Demon Lord.

—I am the Demon Lord, Diablo!

His lips contorted into a devilish grin. His expression was sadistic and hostile — an authentic Demon Lord's expression.

"Out of my way!" he barked, throwing Noah away.

"Eeee?! Aaaah!"

"Hmph! Begone!" Diablo said, not even sparing a look in her direction.

Her scream of despair was cut off when one of Gewalt's summon beasts — 《Flying Worm》 — soared through the air and swallowed her up. Standing on top of the worm, Gewalt puffed a kiss in Diablo's direction, as if to say, "I'll handle this."

Same here, Diablo thought to himself.

Gewalt could have run away on his own, but he hid and waited beneath them. If Diablo had to fight while having to worry about Noah, who wasn't used to combat, it would make things needlessly difficult for him. Gewalt, knowing Diablo's personality, offered him the right sort of support.

—You're an evil bastard and a freak, but just this once I'm glad you're here.

Now he could focus on fighting.

"Use the Demon Lord's staff!" Klem's voice said in his mind.

—*There's a Demon Lord's staff?*

Diablo thrust his right hand forward and a jet-black staff appeared out of thin air. Its name drifted in Diablo's mind. 《The Staff of Annihilation》. He gripped it and glared at Cross Reverie.

“Pardon the delay, you lowly thief. But now I shall strike into your heart the sort of terror only a true Demon Lord can!”

†

At the Inner Sanctum...

As the hours went by since Diablo and his party infiltrated the Magimatic Castle Viovix, the people hiding away waited with bated breath. They could hear the explosions from afar. Suddenly, the Gelmed Empire's moving castle's contours bent and twisted. Its bottom crumbled away and spilled onto the ground below.

The people gasped and began praying ardently. Having received a report from the Paladin Tria, Lumachina stepped out to the Inner Sanctum's balcony. Another loud explosion rocked the air. Tria hurriedly covered Lumachina's body, shielding her.

“Your Grace, you can't be here! Please return indoors!”

“Thank you, Tria.” Lumachina shook her head. “But I'll be fine.”

If an attack as powerful as that explosion were to come this way, being inside the Inner Sanctum wouldn't save her.

“Is that... a Magimatic Sol?!” Rem said, leaning off the balcony.

She thought she could see some kind of mechanical unit flying between the pieces of small rubble in the distance. It was hard to tell, given the distance.

Diablo was probably fighting it. Or perhaps Noah, who was a high-level sorcerer as well.

“Is that Diablo over there...?” Shera said, leaning over the balcony's railing too.

“You can see him?!” Rem said, squinting her eyes.

“There’s like...someone in black armor floating there? And they’re fighting this white giant.”

“...I can’t see anything,” Rem murmured bitterly.

In terms of racial attributes, Pantherians had better eyesight than the Elves. But Shera did have a higher level as an archer. Sylvie, who was standing nearby, wore a smirk. She was also gazing at the enemy castle, and nodded as if impressed.

“I’m surprised you two can see that far. All I can see is rubble and stuff falling out.”

“Grasswalkers are a race that excels at hearing, not eyesight,” Rem pointed out.

“Yeaah, but with this rainy weather, all I can hear is debris falling and explosions,” she said, her bunny ears twitching.

“See!” Shera pointed ahead. “That black armor person is flying around!”

“...Doesn’t Diablo have a cloak, though? And I think there was some Elf with dark clothes in the Palace Knights.”

“Yeah, but I don’t think anyone in the Palace Knights looked like that...” Shera frowned. “It’s more spiky... But it’s different from Diablo too.”

“...I can’t see it from this distance,” Rem said. “But I can tell that there’s an absurd battle going on there.”

The Magimatic Sol that Rem and her group fought, 《Violanos of the Purple》, had impressive armor and weapons, but they somehow managed to squeeze out a win. Despite its strength, it didn’t have the kind of fighting power to make explosions that would be so visible from afar, nor any offense that could shake the ground like this.

That Magimatic Sol was different from the rest.

“But it’s hard to tell,” Shera said, shrugging.

“...We could get closer, but...” Rem trailed off.

She had summon beasts capable of flying. They would deplete her MP, but

she had potions ready for that, so she could manage. But given her personal position, she had to hesitate. What if getting closer would just get her captured...?

Rem was the Girl of the Vessel that Emperor Gelmed was so keen on capturing, after all.

“Let’s check it out!” Shera raised her voice.

“...Getting closer would be dangerous,” Rem said tersely.

“Wouldn’t we just impede Lord Diablo if we do that?” Lumachina agreed.

Contrary to what he often said, Diablo seemed to care even about the lives of his enemies. Rem was capable of mercilessly attacking a hostile opponent, but Diablo always seemed to hold back. And if Shera was on the battlefield, Diablo would focus on protecting her, and the enemy could take advantage of that.

Shera had to have understood at least that much.

“I didn’t mean I’d go watch it myself,” Shera said, taking out a summon crystal from her pocket and invoking it. “Please, 《Turkey Shot》!”

The bird-shaped summon beast had a reconnaissance ability that allowed it to share its line of sight with the caster.

“Oh, right, you did have that option...” Rem said, clapping in realization.

“Wow, Rem, that’s rude! I’m a summoner, you know?!”

“...Just get going. It’s pretty far, isn’t it? You don’t have that much MP.”

“Boo!” Shera pouted as she sent Turkey Shot flying.

—Now we’ll have some grasp on what’s happening in the battle.

Rem’s fingers tightened around a summon crystal. The many pieces of equipment Diablo gave her greatly powered up her summons, and she now had more flying summon beasts. She knew she couldn’t afford to get any closer, but...

Rem looked around. They had a healer in Lumachina, an enchanter in Sylvie, and a thief in Horn. Rose was still damaged, and the other people here weren’t at a level where they should be on the battlefield. In other words, Rem was the

only combat-capable person here. If the situation were to turn dire, it would be up to her to fight.

She resolved to do as such.

†

Below Castle Viovix...

The airborne battle continued. Emperor Gelmed, hidden within the Magimatic Garment Cross Reverie, raised both its palms. Diablo, clad in his Shining Wing Armor, held the Staff of Annihilation at his hip and glared at him silently.

“What’s wrong, fool who dares call himself a Demon Lord? Where is that true horror you promised me? There is nothing left in this world anyone could teach m—”

“Haa!” Diablo raised his voice suddenly, swinging his right fist.

At that moment, he closed the distance with the Emperor at once. Thrusting the staff like a spear, he sank it into Cross Reverie’s chestpiece.

“Ngh?!” The Emperor let out a gasp.

He’d learned how to use the Glow from Solami, which doubled his physical attributes. He used a charge-type martial art, and with the Shining Wing Armor buffing his stats further, it almost looked like he had just teleported. Even his own eyes couldn’t keep up with these movements.

—Get used to it! It’s like being shot with a magi-gun from close range! I should be fast enough to avoid it!

Cross Reverie swept its arm in an attempt to swat him away.

“Ha!” Diablo ducked to avoid the blow.

But even though he’d completely dodged the attack, it still impacted him. The shock wave made his field of vision swirl as he was blown back with a metallic screech. If he weren’t protected by his armor, the shock wave would have surely plucked his head right off.

“Ugh...!”

The attack had a 《Sure Hit》 effect. Diablo kicked against the air and flew back

to his earlier spot. This new way of flying felt different from how he normally used flight magic. At first, he was a little panicked that he wouldn't be able to properly use it, but now he had a better handle on it. It was capable of acceleration, braking, and was overall perhaps a little too responsive.

He rushed and landed a kick on Cross Reverie, but it felt like he'd just kicked a rock. The Magimatic Garment's 《Divine Barrier》 was active again. He could hear Emperor Gelmed's voice from under the crushed chestplate.

"You have my praises. You are the first to damage my holy garment. But it is all meaningless."

Like a film rapidly rewinding, the chestplate returned to its former, unblemished form. It took no time at all to repair itself, like Diablo's attack had never happened.

Diablo scoffed back at him.

"God's miracles, like healing, protection, and purification. It's not surprising you can do this, given the power you've stolen."

"Then you finally see how powerless you are."

"You think yourself a god simply because of the power you've stolen? You can restore yourself all you want; I'll simply destroy you every time you do... For I am the Dark Lord of Annihilation!"

Diablo thrust his staff forward. The Divine Barrier stood in his way, but he nonetheless parted his lips and shouted.

"《Pulverize》!"

It pierced. This ability of the Demon Lord Krebskulm destroyed the Divine Barrier, which shattered like glass. The staff in his hand bashed into Cross Reverie's headpiece, crushing and bending it out of shape.

"What?!" the Emperor exclaimed.

—I can fight him! With the Demon Lord's power, I can penetrate Emperor Gelmed's barrier!

"Get him now!" Klem ordered him.

“《Cold Ring》!” Diablo unleashed a spell at point-blank range.

A powerful water element spell. It would have taken Diablo a few seconds to chant, but the Shining Wing Armor allowed him to cast it instantly. Cross Reverie’s smashed armor froze over with white frost.

“Impudent fool!” The enemy again swept its arm through the air, like it was trying to swat away a troublesome fly.

Diablo evaded Emperor Gelmed’s attack and pounded another kick into Cross Reverie.

“《Grand Crash》!”

A powerful earth element spell that unleashed a shock wave strong enough to destroy the very earth beneath them directly hit Cross Reverie’s head, shattering the frozen armor.

“How many times must I tell you that it’s pointless?! My divine body can recover from this kind of damage at once—”

“You’re slow, old man!” Diablo exclaimed as he continued attacking. He thrust out his left hand, grabbing onto the now unarmored, soggy, slimy head. He then pierced his staff into it and cast one of the highest-level spells in Krebskulm’s arsenal at point-blank range.

“《World Halation》!”

The spell had enough force to it to twist the world around it, converting all matter in its area of effect into heat... And its effects kicked in faster than Gelmed could recover.

“Bwhaaa?!” the old Emperor croaked.

“Perish, along with your divine power!”

—*Should I really destroy him, though?*

He said those words in the heat of the moment, but he had some doubts about whether killing something so divine was the right thing to do. Still, this world’s god was dead, and leaving his powers in the hands of a man hellbent on destroying the races would only be bad for the world.

The Magimatic Garment began to contort, crumbling into a shape that wasn't even recognizable. The robotic form melted like candy, but as it did, the Emperor's voice echoed out clearly.

“《Apocalypse Combine》!”

“What?!” Diablo breathed out.

The air began to tremble.

“...W...We've lost... It's over,” Diablo heard Klem's shaking voice in his head.

“Huh?! What are you saying?!” Diablo chided her.

“Curse the Emperor! He drew on God's power to such a level... This Demon Lord underestimated him.”

†

Large projectiles of light appeared from nowhere and began flying all around him.

“Ugh?!” Diablo winced as one of them grazed his shoulder.

Covering fire?! But where is it coming from?!

Diablo tried to avoid them, but his body felt oddly heavy, like something was pulling him into the line of fire.

—These things have Sure Hit too?!

He tried to deflect them with his staff, but the powerful impact of the blasts sent him flying.

“Ghaaa?!”

He was weak to this kind of damage and didn't have any footing, so he couldn't even brace himself. Another shot came his way from the Magimatic Castle Viovix, while more were also coming from Castle Grandiose on the ground.

—He had soldiers set up to ambush me there?! And their firepower is on the same level as Emperor Gelmed's?! That's absurd!

But upon gazing deeper at the projectiles of light, he realized these were

Magimatic Sols. Arjanos of the Silver, Burix of the Red, Violanos of the Purple, Raumunus of the Ash, Viridinus of the Emerald, Erurenus of the Yellow. There were a couple more he didn't recognize, colored navy blue and pale violet. Some of the units were half-destroyed, but they blitzed through the air, shining brightly. They gathered around Cross Reverie while Diablo was kept pinned down. Arjanos and Burix didn't have hatches on their cockpits and were visibly unmanned.

"Kuh... So you summoned the Magimatic Sols?! How are they going to help you now?!"

Diablo once struggled against these things, but it was only because they were manned by members of the races. If they had no pilots, he could mercilessly destroy them. Now that he had a true Demon Lord's power, it wouldn't take him long to do it.

The Magimatic Sols flew about the battlefield before ramming themselves into Cross Reverie's molten form. A gigantic magic circle formed in the air, the likes of which he'd never seen either in the MMORPG or in this world.

"This is..."

The gathered Magimatic Sols let out blinding glows as their forms changed. One unit became a giant arm, while another became a massive leg. Just then, a hole opened in the space between the limbs, and Viatonos of the White — the unit he had banished from this world using Gravity Abyss — appeared from within. Despite it having been crushed back then, it stood completely whole. Its large shield became a chestpiece, connecting to the rest and forming a gigantic robot. Normal Magimatic Sols stood three times the size of the races, but put together they were even bigger than a Large Dragon.

Diablo simply stared, aghast.

"Wh-What is this thing...?!"

At the core of this new unit was the Magimatic Garment Cross Reverie, which he'd melted into liquid just moments ago. It stood brand new, without a single scratch on it, in the center of this combined robot. Emperor Gelmed's old, raspy voice echoed from within the gigantic machine, in stark contrast to the super robot's imposing size.

“Do you see this?! Behold, for this is a miracle! God’s majesty, manifested upon the earth! The Magimatic Sol, Ultimaaaate, God, Crooooooooooss!”

The old man stretched out the name, like a child watching a cartoon might have.

“Forgive me, Diablo...” Klem said bitterly. *“Even if all the separated Demon Lords were to gather, we would stand... no chance against him.”*

The Primordial Demon Lord of this world was shattered into pieces by God. Even the Demon Lord Krebskulm was only one part of the whole, and some time ago, they fought against the Demon Overlord Modinaram, who had absorbed many of the other Demon Lords. His body couldn’t contain their power, so he couldn’t fully capitalize on that strength, but he was strong enough to manifest a false Demon Lord’s Castle.

But Emperor Gelmed wasn’t overwhelmed. He wasn’t some amateur who, despite having a high level, didn’t know how to put his power to good use.

—Of course not. This man defeated God, after all.

He might have been inhuman now, but he was originally a mortal man who overcame God on his own. His combat prowess wasn’t to be trifled with.

The God Cross lifted its fist. The air itself screeched as the colossal mass moved rapidly.

“Return to ashes, ye sinner who dares oppose me!”

“Tch... Don’t think you’re better just because you’re bigger now! I’ll melt you again! World Halation!”

“《Karmic Retribution》.”

A mirror appeared in the air in front of God Cross’ left hand.

—Oh, crap!

By the time Diablo guessed at what was going to happen, he was already blown back.

“Ghaaaa...!” Diablo gasped.

“Diablo?!”

He went unconscious for a moment, but Klem's voice woke him up just barely before he crashed into the ground.

"All is a product of divine retribution," Emperor Gelmed chuckled.

—Save your religious mumbo jumbo for someone who cares.

Diablo cursed in his heart. Maybe it was a translation issue. While everyone around him was speaking this world's language, Diablo could somehow understand them. However, that automatic translation wasn't always entirely accurate and only worked so well.

For example, the concepts of "bank" or "welfare" didn't exist in Lyferia, so even if someone were to say those words, no one would understand their meaning. In much the same way, it wasn't guaranteed Diablo would understand what Emperor Gelmed was talking about. Of course, it's not like he had time to be occupied with the specific meanings of words...

Diablo clenched his fists, and a sharp pain shot through his left arm. Thanks to the Shining Wing Armor, it wasn't torn off, but the bones in his left arm were likely crushed to bits. The pain was making him break into a cold sweat.

—I messed up.

Was his spell reflected? And if so, was the reflected spell not reflected back thanks to the 《Demon Lord's Ring》? Or maybe World Halation simply wasn't an attack that could be reflected?

"Diablo, what do we do?!" Klem asked him. "We don't have a chance!"

"Ngh... Klem... You said you've regained your memories as a Demon Lord, correct?"

"Yes."

"Did any of the people who challenged the Demon Lords ever have a chance to win?"

"...No, they didn't."

Diablo's right hand tightened its grip on the Staff of Annihilation. It was still healthy. Diablo's lips curled up into a smirk.

“Then it’s the same for us.”

—*You can’t call yourself a gamer if you give up just because the odds aren’t in your favor!*

†

God Cross thrust his right hand to the sky.

“《Thunderfall》!”

Countless bolts of lightning rained down from above. Even with the Magimatic Castle Vioviz blocking out the sky, it was a ruthless attack.

“Tch... Does having God’s miracles mean that literally anything goes?!”

Diablo evaded the lightning as well as he could, but his crushed left arm creaked noisily as he moved. He had to hold back the urge to scream in pain.

“《Cremation Arrow》!” Diablo swung his staff through the air in front of him and sent thirteen arrows of demonic fire flying forward. This attack would normally burn its target to ashes, and if the target was set aflame, the fires wouldn’t extinguish until the target was completely destroyed. The arrows connected with God Cross, burning off some of its armor, but it all soon regenerated.

“You call yourself a Demon Lord with such meager strength? Laughable,” the Emperor mocked.

As Diablo moved to evade one of the lightning bolts pursuing him, it suddenly curved and changed direction.

“Ugh?!”

It hit him directly, and while it did deal damage, his armor prevented it from being fatal. Still, it kept Diablo pinned down.

—*Good at everything, aren’t you, stupid Emperor?!*

It seemed God Cross’ attacks weren’t classified as magic — Emperor Gelmed was only referring to his attacks as “miracles” — so the Demon Lord’s Ring’s magic reflection didn’t kick in. Diablo clicked his tongue. It wasn’t unusual for old equipment to become outdated or obsoleted by power creep as one

advanced through a game's stages, but things in this battle were developing way too quickly for him to keep up.

—Raid bosses always were training grounds for new abilities and features... Goddammit, this really is a “real world” in and of itself...because holy shit, this would be one badly balanced game!

“World Halation!” Diablo thrust his staff forward.

“Do you never learn, fool? Karmic Retrib— ngh?!”

While Diablo did shout the spell's name, he didn't actually cast it. Unlike the game, in this world, one had to concentrate on their magical energy to cast spells, which meant it was possible to chant a spell without actually doing anything.

“You fell for it!” Diablo said as he charged ahead. He had observed in his battle with God Cross that when it used an attack, it couldn't simultaneously use another one. Thus, Diablo closed in on the mechanical giant and thrust his staff toward it.

However, in the last second, he realized that Karmic Retribution's mirroring effect didn't actually trigger either. He could almost feel the old man's nasty leer through his armor.

“I don't have to activate my own miracles just because I call them out either,” he said eerily.

“Ugh?!”

He was lured in.

“《Purification》.”

A flash of light spilled from God Cross' mouth, and Diablo couldn't avoid it in time.

“Gaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah?!”

A loud voice filled his ears. The high-pitched tolling of a bell boomed in his head. It felt like something had yanked his ribs straight out of his body. Blood gushed from his flanks, and he felt as if he would soon lose consciousness.

“Gaaah!”

“Nha?! Diablo, are you all right?!”

Once again, Klem’s shouting kept him from slipping away. If he were to close his eyes now, he’d likely never wake up.

Even with his mind fogged over with agony, Diablo acted unflinchingly. Reflexively, he reached into the pouch on his waist and took out a potion, smashing the tube in his hands and letting the fluid spray over him.

Complete recovery. The potion healed him to full health, despite him being on the brink of death. Both his crushed left arm and his destroyed flanks had fully recovered. Still, that didn’t change the fact he was at a disadvantage.

“I can’t believe I fell for that...” Diablo whispered.

Losing in a gamble like that...

“The wisdom of man is powerless in the presence of God,” Emperor Gelmed said gravely.

“Kuh...”

God Cross folded its arms, its mechanical joints creaking. “So, you have the means to heal yourself. Then divine punishment that only injures you has no meaning. I will simply have to wipe you out in a single swing.”

“Heheh... Impatient, aren’t you?” Diablo said, sweating profusely behind his facade. “What, are you getting tired, geezer? Can’t fight long in your old age?”

“I haven’t the time for you,” Emperor Gelmed replied. “I must quickly seize the Girl of the Vessel. Once I destroy you, I will enter the city.”

And if that happened, there probably wouldn’t be anyone left to stop him. The intimidating air spilling from the Emperor increased in volume. It seemed that, true to his words, he intended to finish Diablo off quickly.

That only served to harden Diablo’s resolve.

“I’ll protect them.”

He took two rings out of his pouch: item drops he obtained when he defeated the Demon Overlord Modinaram. One was the 《Ring of Madness》, which

greatly increased his offensive power, but reduced his defenses to nothing. The Shining Wing Armor obeyed his will as if it were an extension of his body, so he was able to remove the gauntlet and put on the ring. He then equipped another ring on his middle finger — a different Demon Lord’s ring. This one had an ability that was entirely unlike the powers of the Demon Lord of the Mind Enkvaros or the Demon Lord of Madness Modinaram.

Its effect was that it would allow whomever wore it to cast a certain spell, but in return, it didn’t allow the usage of any other spells.

—It’s a pretty significant drawback, but I have to make this gamble.

Diablo held up his staff.

“You will come to regret fighting this Demon Lord!” Diablo declared, role playing more earnestly than ever before. “I shall make a prophecy here and now: this grand magic will destroy you!”

In response, God Cross raised its right hand upwards.

“Come forth, Goldinus.”

“What?!”

—This thing can get even stronger?! Diablo thought to himself in panic.

Looking up, he saw a golden spark shoot skyward from the peak of Viovix. The final Magimatic Sol was flying toward them.

Goldinus of the Gold.

Interlude

A heavy rain lashed down on the deck of the Magimatic Castle Viovix. A Pantherian lance user — Chobi — fell to one knee and spoke between pained gasps.

“Thanatos...I thought...you couldn’t die...”

All around the castle were large, gaping holes from which the storm winds blew into the structure. With the floor having caved in earlier, the whole building was distorted, and cracks ran all across the walls. Lying on the floor was an Elf in black clothes.

“Ugh... Haa... Where is that golden bastard...?” he croaked, his voice agonized.

His abdomen was torn open, and copious amounts of blood gushed from him. It seemed he couldn’t see anymore. His eyes remained open even through the intense rain.

Chobi turned her eyes in the direction of their enemy. Lying on the ground a short distance from them was a Magimatic Sol — Goldinus of the Gold. It creaked and squeaked as it struggled to rise to its feet.

—This damn thing can still move...

“We defeated it... I’ll go deal the finishing blow,” she told Thanatos.

But she was lying.

“Is that...so...?” Thanatos replied with a feeble voice. “Then I’ll let...you handle it...”

“I thought you couldn’t die...”

“This is the...ninth time...”

—I know.

The cloak Thanatos wore allowed him to revive eight times a day. However,

each time he did, it inflicted two penalties on him: it removed some of his memories and forced him to level down.

“And you covered me even though this was your ninth death...” Chobi shook her head. “You really are an idiot, Thanatos.”

“Heh... I moved before I...even knew it...”

“And it got you killed. A sad way to go,” Chobi said with a frown.

“...Could be,” Thanatos replied warily.

Chobi held up her spear as she wiped the tears from her eyes.

“That was a lie,” she followed up. “You were cool back there.”

“...I was the absolute coolest...wasn't I?” Thanatos managed to smirk. She couldn't hear his wheezing breaths any longer.

Chobi withstood the urge to weep and scream. She didn't have time to grieve. Goldinus of the Gold finally rose to its feet, creaking all the while. The armor of its cockpit had been torn off, revealing a woman held in place by tentacles — Alicia.

Chobi had stabbed her with her spear before, but the blow was too shallow.

“Ugh...” She glared at the Pantherian. “What a tenacious woman... You're still alive...?”

“That's my line!” Chobi shouted as she charged.

But before she could reach her target, a golden glow spread from Goldinus.

—*She still has an ace up her sleeve?!* Chobi thought to herself as she jumped away cautiously.

The glow grew brighter by the second.

“Guh...” Alicia's expression contorted in displeasure. “It's...trying to eat me...?!”

The tentacles holding her body in place were coiling around her tighter with disgusting sloshing sounds. Alicia tugged against them, making them temporarily recede.

—She’s fighting against her armor...? Against those tentacles?

“I might be compelled under the yoke of his orders, but I won’t give you my flesh and blood! This body belongs to Lord Diablo! Stop!”

“Wh-What...?” Chobi muttered.

Goldinus stopped moving, giving her the ideal chance to finish it off.

—It has to be now.

But just as that thought crossed Chobi’s mind, she felt a weight at her legs. She looked down, finding Thanatos’ hands resting on her ankles.

“Why?”

It was only a moment’s hesitation, but it was all it took to decide life from death. Goldinus exploded — no, it burst tentacles from its every joint.

“Kaha?!”

“...What?!”

Chobi felt a chill run through her body. If she’d charged ahead, the spewing tentacles would have been all over her. These were man-eating things, so being hit by them would have surely spelled her death.

“You saved me, Thanat—”

His face was so terribly pallid that Chobi didn’t realize how he could have ever moved, but his features were contorted into a final smile, the rain lashing down onto his face. Goldinus floated up, leaving behind discarded tentacles and Alicia lying on the floor.

“What now?!” Chobi stood on guard.

Goldinus simply became a sphere of light and flew off, diving toward the bottom of the castle. Chobi had been hearing explosions for some time now, powerful enough to shake not just the massive castle, but the ground itself. She imagined this was because Noah and the others were off fighting Emperor Gelmed, but she no longer had the strength to come to their aid.

Alicia, lying on the ground, was vomiting profusely. Bloodied chunks of tentacles were spilling from her mouth.

“Answer me, who are you?!” Chobi shouted at her, keeping her spear up defensively. “Are you an enemy?!”

“Haa, aaah... I’m...” Alicia spoke through pained gasps. “I am...Alicia Cristela, an Imperial Knight...I hate you, Palace Knights...with all...my heart...”

“Nng!”

“But... Before I get back at you... Ngh, aaah...” Alicia gritted her teeth bitterly. “I’d rather tear Emperor Gelmed to bits...!”

Chobi let out a sigh of relief and lowered her spear. Apparently, Emperor Gelmed had applied enslavement magic on her.

“You’re not...going to...kill me...?” Alicia stared at her, still lying limply on the ground.

“Huh? Why would I kill you?!” Chobi looked surprised at that sudden question.

“Isn’t that...Elf fencer, your friend...dead because of me...?” Alicia asked through labored breaths.

“...Well, yes... He is, but...” Chobi replied weakly.

“Wasn’t he your friend?”

“A good friend,” Chobi nodded.

“Enough for you to weep for him, even.”

“Tch...” Chobi wiped her eyes hurriedly.

She couldn’t cry on the field of battle. Alicia lay on her back, looking up at the leaden sky. Chobi couldn’t tell what she was thinking.

“I always thought that...vengeance was people’s way of life,” Alicia muttered softly.

“...Understood,” Chobi tightened her grip around her spear.

Chapter 4: Fighting a Godslayer

A sphere of golden light flew down from the top of the Magimatic Castle VioviX, hurtling toward them. Goldinus' hatch was broken and it was missing its pilot.

—Did the tentacles eat her? Or did the Palace Knights kill her? Did she escape? Alicia... Are you alive?

Diablo had no way of confirming Alicia's fate. If he'd have prioritized saving her, he wouldn't have been in this position to begin with.

"Goldisword!"

Goldinus began morphing, assuming the form of a gigantic double-edged sword. Logic clearly didn't apply here. After all, Cross Reverie returned to its former shape despite being broken and melted... And now this humanoid contraption had just become a wielded weapon.

Diablo regarded it cautiously. Just because it was shaped like a sword didn't necessarily mean the Emperor would use it as a blade; it might have even been able to transform again into something else. He couldn't let any preconceived notions hold him back.

The gigantic robot grasped the golden broadsword floating in the air.

"Apocalypse Merge, Ultimate God Cross, complete! I praise you, ye foolish sorcerer who would claim to be a Demon Lord... For I will use my ultimate technique against you!"

God Cross' chestpiece opened, revealing a gigantic tree within its hollow aperture. On the tree's surface was the old man's face.

"Feel divine punishment! You will...be ruined! Ragnarooooook!"

"You've prattled on long enough, old man," Diablo stated grandly. "And thanks to that, I've had enough time to channel my almighty dreadnought-tier spell!"

This was the strongest technique he could access within Klem's memories, so he had to bet on it doing the trick. Diablo thrust his hands forward and unleashed the attack with all of his strength.

“Taaaake...thiiiiis! 《The Flames of Ruinationoooooon》!”

This was the most powerful offensive attack in the MMORPG *Cross Reverie*, and the ultimate technique of the 《Demon Lord of the Eyeball Iankaroz》.

His field of vision was blinded by a flash of light. Emperor Gelmed's face on the tree was grinning.

“I am a complete God. I have discarded my shell as one of the races and ascended to godhood! What can an elemental sorcerer pretending to be a Demon Lord hope to do to me?!”

The gigantic combined Magimatic Sol God Cross swung down its golden sword, connecting with Diablo's Flames of Ruination. The two attacks clashed and struggled, beginning to tear the world apart.

“Nggh?!” Diablo clenched his teeth.

“*The Emperor...*” Klem said, her voice full of panic. “*H-He has so much divine power... It's like the Hero! No, it's even greater...!*”

The blinding light was being pushed back toward Diablo, little by little. He felt his very bones creak, a kind of strain he'd never felt before from the act of casting a spell. The Staff of Annihilation cracked and shattered in his grasp, and the armor plating his arms splintered and broke away with the sound of thick rubber being torn. His flesh began to be carved away as blood splattered from his hands. He felt each and every joint of every finger on his hands bend, crack, and snap off.

“Ugh, ngaaaah?!”

The pain was so intense it nearly knocked him out from the sheer shock. Even so, Diablo didn't allow his focus on the spell to waver. The two competing masses of overwhelming power were now both closing in on him. It wouldn't be long before this ball of blinding light, this swirl of angry mana, swallowed him up entirely.

He could hear Emperor Gelmed's hoarse voice roaring with laughter, confident that he'd won. Diablo turned his eyes upwards.

"Well, well... So you've become a complete divine being, have you?" Diablo whispered. "In which case... I win."

A lone figure leapt down from one of the cracks in the Magimatic Castle Viovox standing high above them. A pair of triangular, fox-like ears flapped in the wind.

It was the former captain of the Magimatic Sol unit, Aira Arjana. Gripped in her hands was *that* weapon — the Lance of Helvetia.

"Emperor Gelmed!" she bellowed. "For my enslaved comrades! Feel the hatred of my comrades...!"

Countless small eyeballs appeared on God Cross' armor, all glaring at Aira.

"Helvetia?! How do you have this lance, cur...?! Stay away from me!"

The gigantic Magimatic Sol's sharp shoulder plate flexibly changed shape. The sharpened metal extended upwards like a branch, piercing through Aira's body.

"Nghhaa?!" Aira howled in pain.

"You mere beast unworthy of being counted among the mortal races! You dare revolt against a God?!"

"You...dirty bastard...!" she said through clenched teeth, swinging the spear over her head.

The moment the tip of the spear touched it, God Cross' armor talons turned to dust and crumbled away.

"With just one blow?! Is my divinity too great?!"

Aira's swings were slow and unwieldy, so God Cross could have dodged them easily. That is, if this were an ordinary situation. It was not, however; not when he was in combat against Diablo. The ultimate attack was still fighting against the most powerful spell.

This created a small opening in his defenses that lasted only a brief moment, but the blood of many had to be spilled to allow for it. Diablo had to literally cut

away at his own life to give her this opportunity.

She pushed onward. The Lance of Helvetia reduced God Cross' armor to dust, and pressing ahead, she finally plunged it into the tree sitting in the center of its chestpiece.

Emperor Gelmed let out a loud, pained scream.

†

"Diablo!" Aira called out. "Finish him!"

The Demon and God Slayer weapon was pierced into the tree that was Emperor Gelmed's true form. God Cross' aura faded away and the gigantic robot fell silent, like a toy that had run out of batteries. Losing power rapidly, its limbs came apart and fell to the ground.

He no longer had the divine power needed to produce miracles. God Cross' Ragnarok and Diablo's Flames of Ruination finally canceled each other out and disappeared. One couldn't say Diablo matched him... Had Aira jumped down any later, he would have been consumed by the light and defeated.

Diablo's hands were crushed to a pulp. Just looking at them made him sick, and the pain was consuming his mind.

"Diablo, can't you shut off your sense of pain?" Klem asked him through the agony. *"Your mind keeps screaming that you're injured. It's a racket in here."*

"Hmph... This doesn't even register as pain for me," Diablo replied. He never thought the day would come when he would have to role play as a Demon Lord even within his own headspace. If she could tell he was hurting, there wasn't really any point in putting on airs about it.

While he thought she'd poke fun at him, she just said, *"Oh, is that so! I knew this wouldn't bother you, Diablo!"* sounding surprisingly impressed. He'd have used an HP potion, but with his fingers all mangled, it was too difficult.

"But the Emperor is still alive, even with the lance stabbing into him!" Klem told him.

"Why won't he just give up...?" Diablo whispered to himself.

"The Emperor changed himself using divine power, but his soul is still human."

If we don't crush his existence to the core, he will eventually recover."

"In other words, my strongest magic..."

"Do it, Diablo!" He could imagine Klem thrusting a fist into the air in his mind's eye.

There was no pitying the Emperor now. His ambitions had cost too many lives, and his empire had deprived too many people of peace. But he had a reason to hesitate.

—Aira's still in range...

She was driving the Lance of Helvetia into the divine tree that served as Emperor Gelmed's core. If he used a powerful spell, it would invariably hit her. The pilot of Burix the Red, Erina Rufelia, had begged him to help Aira Arjana.

And more importantly than that, Aira stabbing the spear into God Cross saved Diablo's life. He owed her. He wanted to save her.

But Aira was willing to accept her death.

"Diablo! Finish him! The Emperor isn't dead yet!"

"Kuh... You're in my way, girl! Get away!" he bellowed at her.

She stared at him with surprised eyes. She realized he was worried about her, which shocked her. But she wore a resigned expression.

"If it would defeat Emperor Gelmed, I don't mind laying down my life. I don't have long left, either way..."

Aira was bleeding from her flank. A thin, sharp branch extended from the Emperor's tree, became a blade, and stabbed into her. Diablo wavered.

—Do I close in on them, cut off that branch, save Aira, and then fire the spell?

Did he have the *time* to do that? Should he just fire the spell immediately? The combined Magimatic Sol God Cross had crumbled away, and now Emperor Gelmed was only protected by the Magimatic Garment Cross Reverie. The Lance of Helvetia tore a large gash into him, but his armor was restoring itself little by little.

Diablo did not have the time to question himself.

“Strike him down quickly, Diablo!” Klem pressed him. *“The Emperor’s regenerating! If that Kobold girl dies, the lance will likely lose all its power!”*

If Aira were to die, the Lance of Helvetia would lose its ability to slay the divine, and Emperor Gelmed would be restored to his previous strength. Diablo would have no other means of defeating him again. Losing this battle would mean everyone he holds dear would die...or worse.

“Kuh...!”

—*Forgive me*, Diablo thought to himself as he extended his destroyed right hand.

His instinct and mind had already resolved that this was the right thing to do. But for whatever reason, he didn’t cast the spell. Instead of chanting, he said something else.

“Someone asked me to save you...with tears in their eyes.”

“Diablo!”

Klem’s scream echoed in his ears, and at the same time, Emperor Gelmed’s voice boomed around him.

“You’re naive, too naive! I wouldn’t believe a man claiming to be a Demon Lord could be so softhearted! It is ever so laughable, and ever so fortunate! I am fated to rule the world after all!”

Cross Reverie’s headpiece contorted in shape, and two arms emerged from it — arms with the wrinkled hands of an old man.

“I won’t let you pull it out!” Aira said, glaring at the arms.

“I won’t kill you,” the old man said. “I shall use you as my shield. I’ll sever your limbs so you can never hold the lance again, then I’ll nail you to my chest.”

He reached for Aira... But then arrows whizzed silently through the air, gouging into Gelmed’s hands. His hoarse voice raised in a cry.

—*Arrows?! Where from?!*

“Diablooooooooo!”

A bright, bubbly voice — which sounded foreign in this strained situation —

reached his ears. Diablo looked in the voice's direction and couldn't believe what he was seeing.

—*Shera?!*

†

Shera was riding on the back of a large bird summon beast, 《Great Eagle》. Due to the unsteady footing, she was resting on one knee to shoot. And the bird's summoner...was Rem, striding across the sky with the Glow, her shining fist swung out in front of her.

She approached Aira like a hurtling missile, slamming her fist enveloped by the Glow against the branch stabbing into Aira. She then grabbed hold of Aira and leapt away.

“Now, Diablo!” Rem shouted.

Raging tentacles spurted out of Cross Reverie in what looked like an explosion, and Emperor Gelmed began screaming again. “Ooooh! At long last, the Girl of the Vessel! At long, long last! You are finally before me!”

The tentacles pursued Rem, who kicked in midair and bolted off.

“Hah!” she scoffed at him. “You won't ever lay hands on me! Diablo won't let you!”

Rem accelerated to a speed that matched Diablo's with the Shining Wing Armor.

“Hmhm, it seems she's finally tapped into her latent power,” Klem said in Diablo's mind, satisfied.

“You shan't escape!” Emperor Gelmed howled manically. “You shan't escape me, Girl of the Vessel! Bear me, give birth to me, grant me new life! Bring stability to the world!”

The tentacles doubled in number, crashing down around Rem like a volley of arrows.

Shera unleashed a martial art. “Take this! 《Arrow Storm》!”

“Don't get in my waaaaaaaay!” the Emperor bellowed.

“Aaah?!” Shera grabbed her head, like the very scream was causing her pain.

The Great Eagle turned around and flew in the opposite direction, but not as quickly as Rem. As Diablo looked on, he felt a warmth fill his heart.

—Those two are the only ones for me, after all.

He had no more doubts. He unleashed another powerful spell again.

“Emperor Gelmed... The only thing you’ll gain is your own destruction!”

“Do not try to stand in the way of my ambition, you ordinary, mediocre fool!” the Emperor replied angrily. “My soul must gain new flesh if I am to govern all worlds! It is necessary! Why do you not realize it?!”

“Die! Flames of Ruination!” Diablo ignored him.

“Kuh!”

The ivory Magimatic Garment’s back tore apart as wings erupted out. Like a butterfly bursting out of a chrysalis, the insides of the robot abandoned Cross Reverie along with the wings.

He’d discarded his armor. The tentacles dried out like dying branches, lost their power, and crumbled away. Now airborne, Diablo’s opponent was a winged serpent with Emperor Gelmed’s head and wrinkled face. Its skin was rough and rugged, and its wings were pure white, soft, and graceful, contrasting the ugliness of his face.

“You won’t escape me, Girl of the Vessel!” Gelmed called out hoarsely. He went after Rem, ignoring everything else. Despite moving so quickly, she was being slowed down by having to carry Aira, and that hindrance kept her from shaking him off.

“What...?!”

The winged serpent closed in on Rem.

“Goaaaaaaaaaaaaah!”

But someone stood in Emperor Gelmed’s way.

“Diablo!” Rem called out.

Diablo nodded back at her and smirked fearlessly.

“Heheheh... Chanting doesn’t mean I actually unleashed my spell. What made you fall for this trick now? Losing your composure, Emperor?”

Diablo didn’t fire his spell earlier, as he’d correctly predicted that the Emperor would avoid it and target Rem. He’d taken off the Demon Lord of the Eyeball’s Iankaroz’s ring earlier, meaning he couldn’t even cast Flames of Ruination anymore.

“Out of my waaaaaaaaaaaaaay!” the Emperor shouted at him. “Don’t interfereeeeeeeere!”

The winged serpent opened its gigantic mouth, revealing rows of teeth that looked like daggers. His howls were full of magical energy, becoming curses that washed over Diablo like a shock wave. Countless cracks ran through the Shining Wing Armor as the curse penetrated his armor and dealt damage directly to his body.

Diablo felt his entrails shake and bodily fluids fill his mouth, but he spat out all the blood and tanked the pain as he chanted his spell. “Get blown to bits, you madman! Infinity Detonation!”

The Demon Lord spell was activated at point-blank range, its flash engulfing the winged snake.

“Gyaaghaaaaa!” the Emperor howled.

His ugly form, his ear-splitting voice, his vast magical energy — it all disappeared into the magical light as the winged serpent was tattered by the spell.

—*Will this...do it?*

Diablo remained vigilant. He’d fired one powerful spell after another, but nothing had finished him yet. He had never so much as now longed for this world to have a victory fanfare play out when you win, just like in the game.

“Ah...!”

The serpent spasmed. Its shadow inched forward, like it was swimming through the flash of the Infinity Detonation spell. It was already half-destroyed, most of its magical energy was dispersed, and its voice was by now only a raspy

whisper in the wind.

A dark premonition filled Diablo's heart. Another divine miracle. Even after setting up this kind of situation, he still couldn't beat him. Diablo turned around.

—What about the two of them?!

The avian flying beast had gotten quite far, and with Rem on its back. Aira seemed unharmed, and he could see Shera as well. He called their names, but they were too distant to hear him.

—Get away from here. As far as you can.

So long as they kept their distance, they'd surely manage to escape. Diablo gritted his teeth. As he did, the glow of that miracle caught up to him, covering him entirely.

—Death.

He didn't feel any pain like he was expecting. This wasn't an attack. In fact, as the white light enveloped him, it felt like all of the wounds inflicted on him during this battle were being healed.

—What's going on?

And what filled Diablo's ears next was...

Interlude

The silence was so complete it was almost loud. Everything around him was white, so he couldn't tell the floor apart from the ceiling and the walls.

Emperor Gelmed's serpentine body, the Magimatic Castle Viovix, Rem's and Shera's retreating figures, the moist ground, the rain, the burning capital — it was all gone.

Just white as far as the eye could see.

"I've...been here before?" Diablo whispered.

He looked around. Where there once was nothing but a void a few moments ago now stood a man. He was clad in a thin cloth hanging from his shoulders.

He was tall, gangly, and looked to be about thirty, with finely chiseled features that struck Diablo as somehow familiar.

“I never would have imagined...” the man said, parting his dry lips. “That someone in that world could ever defeat me.”

“Hm?” Diablo furrowed his brows, confused.

“I suppose that when I was faced with the Girl of the Vessel, my judgment was clouded...”

“Y-You!” Diablo’s eyes narrowed in realization. “You’re Emperor Gelmed?!”

Diablo guarded himself, but the man simply stood there, defenseless.

“You win,” he said. “No... This victory goes to both of you... I never imagined a Demon Lord would lend their help to a member of the races.”

The cracks on the Shining Wing Armor expanded little by little, and then splintered off into particles of light. Steadily, Diablo returned to his former appearance, losing his Krebskulm-like form. For a moment, Diablo dreaded that Klem might have disappeared here, but the particles soon reconverged, forming the body of a child. Her horns, her tail, and her long fluttering hair were all there.

Diablo wrapped his arms around her body.

“Klem! Klem!”

He called her name again and again, and the girl slowly opened her eyes.

“Mm...?” she voiced groggily.

“Are you all right?! Do you recognize me?!” Diablo asked her.

“...Aye,” she said weakly. “I see you’ve won.”

Did he win, though? The man he thought was Emperor Gelmed said the same thing.

“Hmph...” Klem scoffed in his arms. “But we were sent to a rather troublesome place.”

“You know what this place is?!” Diablo asked her, surprised.

Before Klem could answer, the man chuckled.

“A corridor!” he declared. “A corridor to other worlds. I find it hard to believe a transcendent like me could lose to a man ignorant enough not to know that.”

“...A corridor to another world?” Diablo asked.

“Hm,” Klem nodded. “Since you’re an outsider, you had to have passed through here at least once before. It’s this Demon Lord’s first time here, though.”

A long time ago, Diablo was summoned from his original world to this one in the form of his player character in the MMORPG *Cross Reverie*.

—It feels kind of familiar...but I can’t remember.

“Crossing between different worlds is most unusual,” Klem added, sensing his confusion. “It only makes sense your mind would be scrambled by it.”

Did she mean his memory was being faulty because of it?

“Can we go back?” Diablo asked.

“Do you mean to the world you were originally born in, or—” Klem began.

“I mean to the world where Rem and Shera are,” Diablo replied unflinchingly.

Klem regarded him with a somewhat bothered expression.

“This Demon Lord would love to go back, but...”

Both of them turned their eyes to Emperor Gelmed. The lanky man shrugged theatrically and spread his arms.

“A Demon Lord or a sorcerer won’t be able to do it. Only God’s miracles can allow passage through corridors to other worlds. Feel free to wander this place for all eternity, dreaming of your home worlds.”

“Are you a fool?!” Klem glared at him gravely. “If you die in a nonexistent place like this, your soul will never find salvation! You’ll only find a void more vast and bottomless than any world’s end here! That’s even worse than falling to Hell!”

But Emperor Gelmed’s expression remained unchanged. He was well aware of that.

“Demon Lord, you may know of the rules of the countless worlds and universes, but you know not of the lot of man. In order to surpass God, I made an oath, and I intended to fulfill it.”

Over his bony chest, right over his heart, letters of some kind were etched onto his flesh, but Diablo couldn't read them. It probably wasn't Lyferia's text, anyway.

“You!” Klem's eyes widened. “You promised the price of a thousand incarnations?!”

“To gain limitless power, I've atoned for countless sins! It was necessary, if I was to make my ambition a reality.”

“And what you wanted was to become that terrible monster?”

“I wanted to free this world from the yoke of the gods. I'd grown weary of being ruled over like cattle, of dancing in the palms of their hands.”

“You wanted to liberate the world from the gods...?” Diablo asked quizzically.

But, as seemed to often be the case with this man, the words of another failed to reach Emperor Gelmed's ears.

“...And I reached it... I'd gained the power to ascend to godhood... But I couldn't escape the shackles of mortality. Man will forever remain man, it seems...”

Diablo thought back to their battle. It didn't feel like he fought someone who was “only human.” Gelmed was more monstrous than any creature he'd ever faced. Even when he joined forces with the most high-level party in all of Lyferia, they were still almost completely wiped out. Only through borrowing the power of the Demon Lord Krebskulm was he able to squeeze out a win.

And that monster he had faced now looked so...frail.

With a vacant expression, Emperor Gelmed again parted his cracked lips and spoke with a fleeting, fading voice.

“And you too will surely meet a pitiful death...worthy of your efforts...”

His words sounded like a curse — a condemnation. Diablo almost flinched, but he was able to keep himself from doing so. He filled himself with strength

and held his ground. Letting the opponent's hatred overwhelm him wasn't something a Demon Lord would do.

"Hmph. Keep talking, you pathetic novice. Even death bows down before a Demon Lord!"

His boast was met with silence. Emperor Gelmed didn't retort, and he would never say anything again. He began crumbling away. Like a statue becoming sand, his fragments crumbled at his feet. Before long, he was completely gone, as if all the color he was made up of faded away into the white void that made up this non-world.

His very presence was gone.

"That one's soul..." Klem sighed. "It will wander this space forever."

Diablo couldn't fathom the true weight of those words. But no matter who Emperor Gelmed was, seeing someone meet their end was always bitter. It almost felt naive to feel that way, given how much suffering he'd inflicted on others.

And more than anything, he had damned them — Klem had no way to get back home. Emperor Gelmed said that only God's miracles could allow passage through corridors to other worlds, and after bringing them here, he passed away.

"Good grief," Klem sighed again. "Unless another god gives us some kind of miracle, we really will spend the rest of eternity here."

"No... That can't be, right?" Diablo looked at her, shocked.

"This Demon Lord is used to it, but..."

True, Klem did spend countless years sealed within Rem's bloodline.

"We're going to spend eternity...in a place like this...?" Diablo asked in disbelief.

"Aaah, I'm getting hungry already..." Klem grumbled despondently.

It had been hours since they'd infiltrated the Magimatic Castle Viovix, and there didn't seem to be any food or water in this space.

Diablo looked around again. And indeed, there were no walls, floors, or ceilings to be seen...

†

—*How long has it been?* Diablo wondered to himself.

“I’m pretty sure it’s been a few hours, at least...”

His body felt the same as it did when he came here. Klem squatted at his feet.

“Hm, it seems we’re in the same state this Demon Lord was in when I was sealed. We’re currently in half-spirit form.”

“Like summon beasts?” Diablo asked.

“Something like that,” Klem said moodily. “I’m bored, I’m bored, give me something to do!”

Klem, lying on the ground, thrashed her hands and feet in frustration. She looked like a child throwing a tantrum.

“Didn’t you spend years sealed already?” Diablo asked.

“Again?! I have to go through it again?!” Klem was outraged.

“Hm...”

Diablo looked down at himself. Maybe it was thanks to being a spiritual body, but he didn’t have any damage from the battle anymore; his limbs and organs were all intact. He still felt fatigued and hungry, but not sleepy.

Klem got to her feet and stretched with a moan.

“...I wish we at least had some books here or something,” she grumbled.

Diablo was about to agree when he suddenly realized something.

“Klem, you can read?”

“Of course I can read. I’m a Demon Lord, after all! You’re just not interested in culture enough.”

“Ugh...” Diablo groaned.

“Well, in the past, this Demon Lord only cared about destroying everything.”

—*That sounds brutish.*

Still, it was clear Klem knew a great deal.

“Do you understand why magic works?” Diablo asked.

“Of course. A Demon Lord rules over all things demonic and magical.”

“I see...”

“If I had to say, the fact you can cast magic without understanding it shows that you’re the one who’s working outside the rules here.”

“Hmm...”

Diablo simply worked by feeling like he was casting spells from the game, but he didn’t understand anything about how it really worked. And Klem could tell.

“I mean, I was in your head for a time,” Klem shrugged. “You outsiders are fascinating.”

“Ah... Yeah...”

Diablo felt himself break into a nervous, cold sweat. Klem simply scoffed at him.

“Are you interested in knowing? Very well! This Demon Lord will teach you of magical energy and sorcery! We’ve got nothing better to do, after all!”

A Demon Lord studying magic came across as...off. Not very Demon Lord-ly. But he couldn’t deny that he was curious about it, and this felt like the perfect chance. Diablo sat opposite Klem.

“Fine!” he said, crossing his arms arrogantly. “I am bored as well. Discussing the nature of magic with a Demon Lord should be a worthy pastime.”

“Ah!” Klem let out a strange sound and reached her hand out to him.

“Wh-What? You want a fee? Do you want me to pay you money? Or in biscuits?”

“Hand Edelgard over!” she told him. “We have time, so I can give her magical energy and revive her.”

“Right...!”

Diablo reached into his leather pouch, no different from opening his inventory in *Cross Reverie*. Despite being a small pouch, it could contain many more items than its size suggested. He took out the small, faint blue bell and handed it over to Klem.

“Hmm...” Klem examined it fixedly.

“Can you restore her?”

Edelgard had crumbled to particles of light and was destroyed, but Klem turned her soul — or maybe her memories — into this small bell. Could she put her back the way she was?

“I don’t know! For now, I’ll try restoring her lost energy.”

“Hm.”

Klem brought the conversation back on track as she fiddled with the bell in her hand.

“You see, to begin with, magical energy is—”

In a world of frozen time, Diablo learned many things from Klem.

Chapter 5: Being Summoned to Another World

—*How many days has it been?* How many months — no, years — had he spent there? In that white space without walls or ceilings or a floor, where night never fell and dawn never broke, where hunger and slumber didn't exist?

Spending so long in that place numbed his sense of time. Had he been here all alone, he'd have surely gone mad, but Diablo thankfully had Klem to keep him company. She was a real Demon Lord with knowledge on par with God, and the things she told him touched on the very structure of the world and the origin of sorcery. The sheer scale and magnitude of her words was beyond description.

After talking for a very long time, Klem suddenly fell silent.

"Nnng...?"

"What's wrong?" Diablo stood up.

And then he realized that the white space was shaking. Was this an earthquake?

"...I can hear someone," Klem said, listening carefully.

"A voice?"

Diablo concentrated his hearing. He could indeed make out someone's voice.

"Oh, hero."

It wasn't a familiar voice. For a moment, he was hoping Rem and Shera were summoning him, but it was someone else. After all, they didn't know Diablo was even trapped in this white world.

"Come forth, hero."

For a moment, Diablo hesitated. He was no hero.

"This is a summoning," Klem said. "Since we can hear them, it must mean someone on that side has the power to make miracles. I think."

In other words, this was summoning sorcery, and they were calling for a hero.

What this summoner was seeking was certainly not a socially crippled gamer like Diablo, who could only get through life by role playing as a Demon Lord.

“What are you going to do?” Klem asked him.

Answering that summoning’s call was up to Diablo. If they were to stay here, Rem and Shera could eventually summon him, but the chances of that were slim. They didn’t know Diablo and Klem were in this predicament to begin with. If he didn’t answer this summon, who was to say when the next chance might come? He couldn’t afford to dawdle.

“Let’s go!” Diablo said, making up his mind.

“Very well!” Klem nodded.

Diablo fell silent.

“Answer my call, brave hero.”

He felt himself break into a nervous sweat.

—How do you even answer a summon...?

Asking Klem how to proceed after he had made such an assertive declaration would be lame. Based on what she’d said, Diablo had already visited this white world once before and answered Rem and Shera’s summon here. But he couldn’t remember ever doing that.

Diablo strained to recall with all his mind. Back then, he...

The voice calling him grew louder in volume.

“My name is Mariabelle de Lucrecia Grande! Come forth, my hero!”

Diablo raised his voice and called out.

“Call for me, Mariabelle...!”

He’d spoken those words almost subconsciously. And the next moment, he felt the sensation slip from under his feet. A sense of weightlessness overtook him. He was falling.

“Klem!” Diablo reflexively reached his hand out to grab her arm.

“Nhaa?!”

But as soon as he heard her yelp, Diablo found himself in a pitch-dark space, a great contrast to where he had just been. He looked around in the darkness, noticing flickering lights. Countless sparks flickered in the darkness.

Diablo realized where he was; he was floating in a sea of stars.

—Is this outer space...?

“Fool!” Klem clamored. “A summoning can only call one person! If this Demon Lord comes with you, it could fail!”

“Ah...”

Diablo wasn’t as ignorant as he was before. Having learned the basic truth of magic, he could now understand what she meant with ease... But he had grabbed her before he’d even realized it.

“This is bad!” Klem continued. “If the summon fails, we could both fall into the interstice between worlds!”

Perhaps. But Diablo didn’t regret what he’d done.

“If I’d left you there, I never would have seen you again.”

“Mmg...” Klem flinched uncomfortably.

“If the summoner’s power is insufficient, I will simply supplement it with my own power. Given what you taught me, it should be possible.”

“That’s mad! You don’t know what world’s magic we’re dealing with!”

“I will handle it! I refuse to stay in that white nowhere, nor will I leave you there forever!”

Diablo focused on the spell weaving around them and analyzed it. It was different from the sorcery Klem taught him, but it wasn’t beyond his understanding. He could see some points of commonality, like a different game that shared the same fundamental system.

—If I do this...!

“Diablo...” Klem said, gazing at him fixedly. “You really are too kind to call yourself a Demon Lord.”

That made him feel bashful all of a sudden.

“D-Don’t be stupid!” Diablo shook his head. “You belong to me! I won’t let go of you, nor will I permit you to leave me without permission! That’s all there is to it! Mm, huh?”

“Oh, right...” Klem brought a hand to her neck.

The 《Enslavement Collar》 that should have been there...

“It’s gone?!” the two of them said as one.

They realized, a bit too late, that it had been missing since they reached the white world.

“Aah. When this Demon Lord became the Shining Wing Armor, the magical energy that made up my body was destroyed, and any spells placed on me likely lifted.”

Diablo could understand what she meant now.

“Enslavement sorcery is placed on the body, after all.”

But their conversation cut off there. They were drawn to one of the countless lights, rapidly closing in on a single sphere — a star. They broke through a layer of clouds and seemed to be approaching the ground rapidly. Were they crashing?! Did the summoning fail?! Diablo prepared himself for the possibility of death.

“Whaaaaaaaaaaaaa!” he screamed.

“Hahahaha!” Klem cackled.

They fell at planet-splitting speed. Only when they touched down safely did Diablo realize that teleportation magic saved them.

†

Diablo found himself in a dark room. The stone floor had a magic circle drawn with a red, blood-like fluid. The four corners of the room were illuminated by torches, making the room’s shadows dance with the flickering of their flames. A girl with strong, willful eyes stood before them.

“I...called him...” she muttered, half in disbelief.

“Oooh!” A knight in armor standing nearby raised his voice in surprise.

The girl stepped forward toward Diablo. She had argent hair and scarlet eyes, her skin was a pale white, and the bridge of her nose was pointed. On top of all that, she had long, pointy ears.

—Is she an Elf...?

Apparently, this girl was his summoner, Mariabelle. This time, he was summoned by only one girl. Diablo looked around, only to find Klem peeking out behind him.

“There’s an odd smell here,” she said, sniffing the air.

“There is?”

The only things that gave off any scent back in the white world were himself and Klem. Here, however, they could smell the oil burning on the torches, the musty scent of the dust on the stone floor, as well as the girl’s flowery perfume. Everything felt terribly familiar, yet new all at once.

Mariabelle peered at them dubiously.

“Two heroes...?”

Diablo could tell explaining things was going to be a bother.

“This one is my familiar,” Diablo told her.

He couldn’t introduce her as another world’s Demon Lord, after all. Diablo had to play the act of a hero here, and Klem was clever enough to stay silent. The girl nodded, seemingly satisfied with this explanation.

“Great hero, I am the star sorceress Mariabelle de Lucrecia Grande,” the girl said.

“Hm,” Diablo hummed in agreement.

Star sorceress. That wasn’t a class he was familiar with. Wherever he was, it definitely wasn’t Lyferia.

“The sorceress gave you her name, yet you don’t introduce yourself?!” The armored knight glared at him. “Even if you are a hero, this is insolence!”

Despite all he’d learned from Klem, his communication skills hadn’t leveled up one bit. Still, if he were to act meek, Mariabelle could decide to reverse his

summoning, and that was something he couldn't afford. After all, he didn't have any clues about how to get back to his world again. And so, stifling his bashfulness, he spoke brazenly.

"Hmph! My name is Diablo! A Dem—hm, *hero* from another world!"

—*See? I've matured!*

He would praise himself if he could. Klem nodded in agreement.

"Diablo the Hero, please," Mariabelle said, kneeling before him. "Please, save me and this country..."

So far, everything seemed to be going according to RPG cliches. But just then, the knight at her side drew his sword furiously.

"Wait, sorceress! I can't trust this man!"

"What are you saying, Leon?"

"The Demon Star Manuscript doesn't mention anything about the hero having horns!"



“W-Well...”

“I am Leon Nirgadeon! If you claim to be a hero, prove your worth to me!”

Crap!

Is what Diablo would have thought, but he simply scratched his head.

“Hm... You shouldn’t,” Diablo said simply.

“What?”

“I can tell how strong you are from how you carry yourself. You’re no match for me.”

Mariabelle was his summoner, and if this knight called Leon was protecting her, they were allies. There was no point in Diablo injuring him. That was *his* thought process, but Leon simply shouted angrily.

“You dare insult me?!”

The knight slashed at him sooner than Mariabelle could stop him.

“Haaaaa!”

The sword’s blade shone and the slash went flying at him from a distance, and since Klem was right behind him, he couldn’t avoid it easily. But he didn’t need to dodge. Diablo swept it away with his arm, like swatting a speck of dust out of the air, deflecting it into the flagstones.

“That’s what I thought,” Diablo shrugged.

“...What?!” Leon exclaimed, his fighting spirit still intact.

Diablo appreciated his mettle, but the fact that he couldn’t see the difference in strength between them was proof that Leon was inexperienced. Deciding he’d need to display the gap between them without hurting him, Diablo thrust his hand out.

“《Bit Arrow》.”

“Ugh?!” Leon guarded himself and took a step back.

But...silence. His spell didn’t generate so much as a puff of smoke.

“Nnng?!” Klem raised her voice in surprise, her eyes as wide as saucers.

Even Diablo, who'd kept up a cool facade, was starting to sweat bullets.

—I can't use my spells?!

"Heh... Heheheh..." he chuckled with a shaking voice. "I was merely joking. I couldn't harm an ally! I am a hero, after all."

He spoke with an odd accent. Mariabelle heaved a sigh of relief.

"I apologize for my disciple's disrespect," she said, bowing her head deeply.

"Keh..." Leon lowered his sword. "Forgive me for testing you like that."

"Hmph," Diablo snorted at him.

Letting himself get too worked up would blow his act, regardless of whether he was a Demon Lord or a hero.

—I can't use magic in this world?!

Klem waved her hands, apparently trying to cast a spell, but in the end she only released magical energy into the air. That said, if her spell did work, she likely would have blown the building to bits. For better and for worse, her efforts only produced a light breeze.

So even a Demon Lord couldn't cast any spells.

"Maybe I should try my true form," Klem said with a frown.

"Don't." Diablo stopped her at once.

"Boo," she cooed, displeased.

If the Demon Lord Krebskulm were to appear here, this entire world would turn against them without a doubt.

"Hm..." Mariabelle brought her face close to his.

"Ah."

Illuminated by the flickering flames of the torches, her fair features gave her the appearance of the living portrait of a holy woman. Her unblemished skin was as flawless as a statue's surface. Diablo's eyes were drawn to her jiggling bosom, and he had to forcibly tear his gaze away.

—They're big.

“My hero?” Mariabelle asked him.

“I-I wasn’t looking.”

“Huh?”

“Ah, hm... Mariabelle, was it? Tell me for what reason you summoned me.”

To gain the freedom he needed, Diablo decided to make himself seem cooperative. That way, he’d gain time to look for clues on how to go back to his world.

“My reasons can come later,” the Elf girl said pensively. “You look quite tired, my hero... I will prepare a room for you to rest in.”

Before Diablo could say anything, Klem pumped a fist enthusiastically.

“Biscuits!” she called out.

“Huh, baked sweets?” Mariabelle said, a bit confused. “Understood. Leon, could you arrange for some sweets to be delivered to their room?”

“...Very well,” her armored disciple said hesitantly.

He left the room, the sound of his armored greaves clanking against the stone floor. Klem followed him, singing a song Shera once made up for her.

“Biscuits, biscuits, tasty biscuits~♪”

Hearing it made Diablo wistful.

“Your familiar is adorable, my hero,” Mariabelle said with a smile.

“My what? Ah, I mean, yes!” Diablo stammered. “She’s a bit spoiled; I’m not sure what to do with her.”

“Come this way, then,” she said, leading him to his room.

†

The room didn’t have any windows. Diablo had to wonder if they were underground, but thanks to the fancy wallpaper laid over the walls, the place didn’t give the impression of a prison cell. Still, the only source of light was a candelabra hanging from the ceiling, so it did feel a bit suffocating.

Between Mariabelle’s outfit, Leon’s armor, and this room’s fixtures, it was

clear the civilization of this land wasn't much different from Lyferia's.

Still, Diablo had never heard of a star sorcerer class, and he couldn't cast any spells. It did seem like this was another world.

—I guess I should obey Mariabelle and gather information for now.

Diablo turned his eyes to the girl; it was currently just the two of them in this room. It seemed she didn't want to share the reason she had to summon a hero with other people. That seemed like trouble.

Diablo noticed there were letters etched into the table's edge. It wasn't a language he recognized, but it looked similar to the Kingdom of Lyferia's text.

"Eiriz... No, Elfiz... king, rule eternal..." he was capable of decoding some of it thanks to the knowledge Klem imparted to him.

"It says 'May King Elfiz rule forever.' Elfiz is the name of this country," Mariabelle said.

"I see."

He'd never heard of a country by that name. This world didn't seem to have any relation to the MMORPG *Cross Reverie*.

"This world is enveloped by the Black Mist," she told him.

That made sense. As is cliché, a hero is summoned when the world is in a state of crisis.

"Black Mist?"

"According to the Demon Star Manuscript, the Black Mist is born of the aberrations, and the aberrations are produced by the Black Mist."

"What is this Demon Star Manuscript?"

"A tome that details the past and future of this world. It's said it was written by the hands of God, and comprehending it is very difficult. Research into it is still underway."

Asking about one piece of jargon only led to more unfamiliar terms.

—Some games are just like that...

Diablo sighed to himself. It was the type of game newcomers hated more than anything, reminiscent of having to study in school. Put simply, the kingdom was faced with some kind of enemy they needed a hero to beat. This necessity comes from some kind of prophecy.

—Just put it simply! I was just thrown into another world without any time to prepare! Don't make this any more confusing for me!

Diablo sighed and sat on the bed. Exhaustion was overwhelming him. Thinking back on it... He went to the frontier city and fought Rem's aunt Solami. He then traveled to the capital, taking the long way around to do so. War broke out as soon as he arrived, which led to him protecting the Inner Sanctum, destroying the Magimatic Sols, and taking lives. He finally stormed the castle and killed the enemy commander.

But it didn't stop there. A moving castle appeared. He invaded the Magimatic Castle Viovox and had a fateful battle of epic proportions with the Emperor. But in the end, he was thrown into the White World... And then he spent a long time with Klem. Diablo didn't know how long it was, really, but it was one thing after another, and it felt like a long string of overwork. His mind and body were beginning to crack.

But then he heard the sound of rustling fabric. A sash fluttered to the floor.

"Hm?" Diablo's gaze settled on it.

"I've made the most progress of anyone when it comes to decoding the Demon Star Manuscript," he heard Mariabelle say.

"Y-Yeah..."

"And because I did, I summoned you, my hero."

"Wha...?!" Diablo felt his voice tense up.

Mariabelle was taking off her clothes. She now stood in her undergarments.

"The manuscript had a passage saying I will offer my body up to a hero," she said.

"O-Oh," Diablo replied.

His voice was calm, but his heart was beating like crazy. He couldn't tear his

eyes from her sensual body.

—Jiggling! Soft! And plump! But wait, there's something written there!

There was a strange, alluring pattern under Mariabelle's navel. It looked like a magic circle and gave off a faint glow.

"I only have technical knowledge of the act, I'm afraid..." she said with a seductive smile. "But I will try to satisfy you, my hero."

She drew her face closer to his and Diablo's body froze up. Her slender hands wrapped around Diablo's rough fingers and brought them to her bosom. His hands sank into her soft, supple breasts.

"B-Boob—waaaaaaah?!" Diablo called out, his eyes widened.

He screamed louder than he ever did during his battle with Emperor Gelmed.



Afterword

Did you all watch season 2 of the anime? It was very well done! I extend my honest gratitude to the production staff and the fans who supported us! Thank you so much!

I actually wrote some of the scripts for the show this time around. Can you tell which ones it was?

Anyway, my apologies for the long wait on this volume. I was planning to write it sooner, but changes in my work environment made me lose drive. But thanks to help from a great many people, I'm now back on track.

This volume concludes the Empire arc. I wrote many pages of combat scenes in volume 9 during the Demon Overlord arc, but this time I probably focused on combat even more. This was definitely the strongest enemy in the series to date. Even I was wondering if Diablo could actually beat him!

I hope you enjoyed this volume. I changed things up this time so I wouldn't just be writing the same plot developments all the time, but the focus on combat this time around meant the heroines got a lot less screen time. I regret that a little, so I definitely intend to have more scenes with Rem and Shera in the next volume! And of course, the next adventure will be a fun romp, so look forward to that!

I'm also currently working on the newest volume of *14-Year-Old and Illustrator* with Keiji Mizoguchi, published by MF Bunko J. And also, my fantasy war epic about a bookworm strategist and a sword-wielding princess, *Altina the Sword Princess*, is also published by MF Bunko J! I'm eagerly working on that series as well.

Now then, for some thanks. To Takahiro Tsurusaki, thank you for your wonderful illustrations! To Ooishi, the designer from Afterglow, thank you as always. To my editor, Shouji, I apologize for all the trouble... It feels like every afterword I end up apologizing to you... But I really am grateful.

To everyone in Kodansha's editorial department and everyone involved in the creation of this book. To the family and friends who supported me. And of course, to the readers who picked up this volume! I offer you a thank-you of the highest level!

Yukiya Murasaki

Table of Contents

[Cover](#)

[Color Illustrations](#)

[The Story So Far](#)

[Prologue](#)

[Chapter 1: Infiltrating the Imperial Castle](#)

[Chapter 2: Coming Face to Face with It](#)

[Chapter 3: Fighting the Emperor](#)

[Interlude](#)

[Chapter 4: Fighting a Godslayer](#)

[Chapter 5: Being Summoned to Another World](#)

[Afterword](#)

[Bonus DLC \(*Available January 2022!*\)](#)

[Bonus Textless Illustrations](#)

[About J-Novel Club](#)

[Copyright](#)

Bonus DLC (Demon Lord Content)

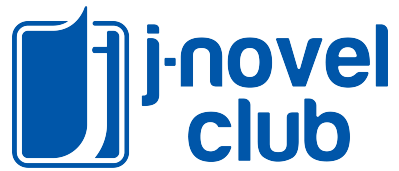
Coming in January 2022! Watch your J-Novel Club user library for an updated book!











Sign up for our mailing list at J-Novel Club to hear about new releases!

[Newsletter](#)

And you can read the latest chapters of series like this by becoming a J-Novel Club Member:

[J-Novel Club Membership](#)

Copyright

How NOT to Summon a Demon Lord: Volume 14

by Yukiya Murasaki

Translated by ZackZeal Edited by Jack Diaz

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, or persons, living or dead, is coincidental.

Copyright © 2021 Yukiya Murasaki Illustrations by Takahiro Tsurusaki All rights reserved.

First published in Japan in 2021 by Kodansha Ltd., Tokyo.

Publication rights for this English edition arranged through Kodansha Ltd., Tokyo.

All rights reserved. In accordance with the U.S. Copyright Act of 1976, the scanning, uploading, and electronic sharing of any part of this book without the permission of the publisher is unlawful piracy and theft of the author's intellectual property.

J-Novel Club LLC

j-novel.club

The publisher is not responsible for websites (or their content) that are not owned by the publisher.

Ebook edition 1.0: October 2021

Premium E-Book